Constructions of meanings of quality within Australian Early Childhood Education and Care policy between 1972 and 2009.

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School of Teacher Education

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DEDICATION

To my father

Desmond Campbell

Who taught me the value of an enquiring mind.
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Certificate of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge and belief, understand that it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services, Charles Sturt University or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of thesis, subject to confidentiality provisions as approved by the University.

Name Helen Logan

Signature _____________________

Date 29.7.16
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Ethical approval

Ethical approval for the research contained in this doctorate was obtained from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee, approval number 302/2011/01.
Statements of contribution of authorship


As co-authors of Article 1, we confirm that Helen Logan has taken primary responsibility for the article, under the supervision of Frances Press and Jennifer Sumsion. In particular, Helen has taken responsibility for:

- Conceptualising the article, including construing the period under investigation as the recent past;
- Reviewing and interpreting the literature including the application of the ‘braided river’ metaphor to outline different streams of research literature and policy debates about quality; and
- Drafting, writing, editing and critically revising all aspects of the article to refine the interpretation of data and ensure readiness for final submission.

Frances and Jennifer made ongoing written contributions to iterative drafts. Their intellectual contributions focused primarily on critically challenging Helen’s interpretations of the literature to ensure the robustness and cohesiveness of the argument.

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Helen Logan  Frances Press  Jennifer Sumsion

Date: 20.9.16

As co-authors of Article 2, we confirm that Helen Logan has taken primary responsibility for the article, under the supervision of Jennifer Sumsion and Frances Press. In particular, Helen has taken responsibility for:

- Conceptualising the article and illuminating the value of elite interviews for gaining insights into the multiple influences on early childhood policy development;
- Reviewing and interpreting the literature pertaining to elite interviews and elite interviewing;
- Analysing and interpreting the data;
- Selecting relevant data extracts for inclusion; and
- Drafting, writing, editing and critically revising all aspects of the article to refine the interpretation of data.

Jennifer and Frances made ongoing written contributions to iterative drafts. Their intellectual contributions focused primarily on critically challenging Helen’s interpretations of the historical literature to ensure the robustness and cohesiveness of the argument.

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Helen Logan  Jennifer Sumsion  Frances Press

Date: 20.9.16

As co-authors of Article 3, we confirm that Helen Logan has taken primary responsibility for the article, under the supervision of Jennifer Sumsion and Frances Press. In particular, Helen has taken responsibility for:

- Conceptualising the article and identifying the significance of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) as a critical juncture in Australian early childhood education and care policy;
- Reviewing and interpreting the literature referring to the introduction and implementation of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth);
- Analysing and interpreting the data;
- Selecting relevant data extracts for inclusion;
- Drafting, writing, editing and critically revising all aspects of the article to refine the interpretation of data.

Jennifer and Frances made ongoing written contributions to iterative drafts. Their intellectual contributions focused primarily on assisting Helen to develop the necessary depth of understanding of historical context; critically challenging her interpretations to ensure depth of analysis and historical accuracy; and providing guidance in the application of multiple theoretical frameworks.

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Helen Logan  Jennifer Sumsion  Frances Press

Date: 20.9.16

As co-authors of Article 4, we confirm that Helen Logan has taken primary responsibility for the article, under the supervision of Frances Press and Jennifer Sumsion. In particular, Helen has taken responsibility for:

- Conceptualising the article and extending the application of the critical juncture to the policy context in which quality became mandated in Australian ECEC policy;
- Reviewing and interpreting the literature referring to path-breaking policy events;
- Selecting, analysing and interpreting the data; and
- Drafting, writing, editing and critically revising all aspects of the article to refine the interpretation of data.

Jennifer and Frances made ongoing written contributions to iterative drafts. Their intellectual contributions included assisting Helen to develop the necessary depth of understanding of historical context; critically challenging her interpretations to ensure depth of analysis and historical accuracy; and providing guidance in the application of multiple theoretical frameworks. They also assisted with reshaping the manuscript to better suit the focus of the journals to which the manuscript was sequentially submitted.

**Signed:**

Helen Logan  Frances Press  Jennifer Sumsion

Date: 20.9.16

As co-authors of Article 5, we confirm that Helen Logan has taken primary responsibility for the article, under the supervision of Jennifer Sumsion and Frances Press. In particular, Helen has taken responsibility for:

- Conceptualising the article and examining the potentiality of critical junctures in ECEC policy;
- Reviewing and interpreting the literature referring to the introduction of the COAG reforms for early childhood [2007-2013];
- Selecting, analysing and interpreting the data; and
- Drafting, writing, editing and critically revising all aspects of the article to contribute to the interpretation of data.

Jennifer and Frances made ongoing written contributions to iterative drafts. Their intellectual contributions focused primarily on ensuring accurate reporting of the contemporary political and policy context; ensuring robustness in the application of the concept of the critical juncture to recent political events; and in guiding the incorporation of journal reviewers’ feedback, where relevant, into the final version of the article.

**Signed:**

Helen Logan  Jennifer Sumsion  Frances Press

Date: 20.9.16

I confirm that I have made the following contributions to authorship:

- Conceptualising the article;
- Reviewing and interpreting the literature;
- Selecting data for analysis;
- Analysing the data; and
- Writing, editing, and revising the article.

Signed:

Helen Logan       Date: 20.9.16

Furthermore, we agree to the inclusion of the six articles identified as part of this doctoral research submitted for examination.

Signed:

Helen Logan       Jennifer Sumsion       Frances Press

20.9.16
List of publications arising from the study

Article One


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Article Three


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*European Early Childhood Education Research Journal.*
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<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACECQA</td>
<td>Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACTU</td>
<td>Australian Council of Trade Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>AECA</td>
<td>Australian Early Childhood Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALRC</td>
<td>Australian Law Reform Commission</td>
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<td>APA</td>
<td>Australian Pre-School Association</td>
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<td>CCCC</td>
<td>Community Child Care Co-operative</td>
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<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRN</td>
<td>Collaborative Research Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSU</td>
<td>Charles Sturt University</td>
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<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
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<td>EAP</td>
<td>Expert Advisory Panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECA</td>
<td>Early Childhood Australia</td>
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<td>ECE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
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<td>ECEC</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education and Care</td>
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<td>ECERS-R</td>
<td>Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised</td>
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EPAC   Economic Planning and Advisory Commission
EPPE   Effective Provision of Preschool Education
EYLF   Early Years Learning Framework\(^1\)
GDP    Gross Domestic Product
GFC    Global Financial Crisis
INAC   Interim National Child Care Accreditation Council
ITERS-R Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised
LDC    Long Day Care
LDCPDP Long Day Care Professional Development Programme
NACBCS National Association of Community Based Children’s Services
NAEYC National Association for the Education of Young Children
NSW    New South Wales
NQF    National Quality Framework
NQS    National Quality Standard
NCAC   National Childcare Accreditation Council
OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QIAS   Quality Improvement and Accreditation System

\(^1\) Belonging, being & becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
QUT Queensland University of Technology


WPR What’s the problem represented to be?
Explanation of key terms as used in this study

**Child care**

In this thesis, the term child care is used to refer primarily to formal services that provide care for children between birth and school age (Press, 2006). This term, sometimes referred to variously as childcare, is used in conjunction with long day care services as specified below.

**Commonwealth Government**

The use of the term Commonwealth Government, sometimes referred to as the Federal Government, refers to the Australian government. Australia has three tiers of government: Commonwealth, States and Territories, and Local Government. Various responsibilities for Australia’s ECEC system are shared between these three tiers of government.

**Council of Australian Governments**

Originally established in 1992, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is a key intergovernmental forum. It consists of the following members: the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. The Prime Minister chairs COAG.

**Critical juncture**

The term critical juncture is used to refer to important moments in policy development that radically alter the trajectory of policy (Pierson, 2004) and produce “overwhelming mandates for policy and/or structural change” (Hogan & Doyle, 2009, p. 213).
Discourse

The term discourse is drawn from Foucauldian perspectives as “the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements” (Foucault, 1972, p. 90). Power operates in discourse to utilise truth claims about what can and can’t be spoken and written about (Mills, 2003). Thus, discourses work in complex ways as, “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 54).

Early childhood education and care

In Australia, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is an overarching term widely used to refer to a range of services for children from birth to five years. Typically, services include long day care centres, preschool, family day care and outside school hours care. Parents using services, or the services themselves, receive government funding and comprise the majority of out-of-home services available for young children (Press & Hayes, 2000). The choice of ECEC has been selected for use in this study as it is a term commonly referred to in national and international policy frameworks to describe a range of early childhood contexts and is inclusive of child care.

Early childhood educator

An early childhood educator refers to a person who provides education and care to children as part of their employment at an ECEC service (ACECQA, 2012).

Early childhood teacher
An early childhood teacher refers to a person with an early childhood teaching qualification as approved by the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA, 2012).

**Elites**

The term elites, sometimes referred as elite informants or policy elites, refers to “high profile personnel who have had access to specialised knowledge and power and provide valuable policy information” (Logan, Sumsion & Press, 2014, p. 712).

**Era**

The term era is used to describe “a period of time marked by distinctive character, events, etc… an era of progress” (Macquarie dictionary, n.d.). In the study, this term is used to refer to three historical eras, that is, the early 1970s; the early 1990s; and the late 2000s.

**Long Day Care**

The term long day care refers to centre-based child care services which usually cater for children from birth to school age. These services are open for a minimum of eight hours per day, five days per week and operate for a minimum of forty eight weeks per year (Press & Hayes, 2000).

**National Quality Reform Agenda**

The National Quality Reform Agenda, sometimes referred to broadly as the COAG reforms, refers to a suite of major national policy reforms introduced between 2007 and 2013 to improve quality in Australian ECEC. Although the COAG reforms extended beyond ECEC, references to the reforms in this thesis refer specifically to ECEC.

**Path dependency**
The use of the term path dependency refers to a tendency for policy decisions to follow well-worn policy paths, influenced by previous political discourses (Scheiwe & Willekens, 2009).

**Policy**

In this thesis, the term policy refers to key government policy documents. As Ball (1994, p. 10) explains, “Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended.” Policy documents include written texts, speeches, interview transcripts, press releases and government reports. In keeping with Ball’s explanation, the use of the term policy also encapsulates processes, such as the enactment of ideas through conversations and interactions with people to produce policy texts.

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Abstract

In Australia, high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) has become a key policy objective, and is connected to national concerns such as improved outcomes for young children, increased workforce participation, gender equity and economic growth. These concerns have contributed to some constructions of quality becoming prominent over others in ECEC policy. Consequently, an emphasis on some constructions skews understandings of quality toward particular meanings and diminishes space for other explanations of quality.

This thesis investigates the question “how has quality been constructed in government policy concerning centre–based long day care in Australia between 1972 and 2009?”. This was a time of transformative policy developments in the Australian ECEC sector. During this period, the number and type of ECEC services, particularly long day care (LDC) services, expanded rapidly for children younger than school age.

In order to answer the research question, a historical policy analysis was undertaken. The analysis drew upon two methodological perspectives: a history of the present (Foucault, 1977) and Pierson’s (2004; 2005) perspectives of policy history. A Foucauldian-influenced history of the present facilitated an in-depth analysis of discourses contained within ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009. This approach problematised constructions of quality by drawing attention to how the concept has been shaped within rationales for policy. Pierson’s perspectives were drawn upon to identify macro-contextual factors of national importance such as social, political and economic dynamics. Although not directly related to early childhood policy, macro-contextual factors appeared important because they influenced how understandings of quality were framed within policy.
The data corpus included legislation, official government policy documents, policy advocacy documents and a list of elite policy informants as potential interview participants. This selection reflected an understanding of policy as more than text alone; it also encompasses words, actions, intent and enactments (Ball, 1994). A data set was then drawn from the corpus of data for close analysis. The data set comprised 10 key policy documents and 13 interview transcripts from individual interviews conducted with 13 elite informants. Together these sources reflected the complexity of policy making processes across almost 40 years of policy developments.

The data set was analysed using two methods. First, a thematic approach was used to identify common themes and patterns in relation to the research questions. Second, Bacchi’s (2009) *What’s the problem represented to be?* (WPR) approach to policy analysis was applied to the data to problematise constructions of quality in policy rationales. These constructions identified how quality has shifted from a marginal feature of ECEC policy in 1972 to a central tenet of the National Early Childhood Development Strategy in 2009. The shifts highlighted the presence of path dependent processes and macro-contextual factors that preceded key moments of policy change, conceptualised as critical junctures. While multiple discourses exist across the period under investigation [1972 – 2009], the study highlighted tensions between three prominent discourses of community, market and investment. These tensions create challenges for provisions of high-quality in ECEC but also provide insights to enhance understandings for achieving high-quality in contemporary ECEC policy.
Part One: Introduction to the thesis
Context of the study

The impetus for this doctoral study began many years ago. It grew out my experiences as an early childhood teacher and more recently as a lecturer in early childhood education at Charles Sturt University (CSU). The study was underpinned by a curiosity about the concept of quality and how it has been constructed in Australian government policy documents. While the concept of quality has been well-endorsed in present-day ECEC policy documents, I questioned why it appeared to have risen to such prominence.

I commenced my career as an early childhood teacher in 1982. Initially, I combined part-time teaching in New South Wales (NSW) primary schools with part-time employment as a teacher/director in a small rural preschool. At the preschool, my roles involved teaching young children and working closely with a parent/community management committee in order to establish the service. It was in this context that I learnt about an aspect of quality that is connected to relationships, teamwork, and drawing on community expertise to ensure the success of a service. These early teaching experiences formed a basis for questioning differing understandings of quality in ECEC.

For the next 20 or so years I taught in a range of early childhood services, which continued to highlight differences in the quality of ECEC available to children and families. However, it wasn’t until late in 2005, when I accepted a position as lecturer in early childhood education at CSU that I began to think more deeply about how quality had been constructed in early childhood policy history. In the years immediately following my commencement at CSU, there was a change of Commonwealth government from the Howard Coalition Government [1996 – 2007], to the Rudd Labor Government [2007 – 2010; 2013]. This change signalled the implementation of national
policy reforms for the early childhood sector. Again, the concept of quality loomed large for me, as these reforms appeared to hinge upon quality. For example, in January 2007 the Australian Labor Party (ALP) released an election policy document titled ‘New directions for Early Childhood Education: Universal Access to Learning for 4 year olds’ (Rudd & Macklin, 2007a). In April 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) communiqué declared “an intergovernmental agreement on a national approach to quality assurance and regulations for early childhood education and care” (COAG, 2007, p. 4). In October 2007, the ALP released a subsequent policy document titled Labor’s Plan for High Quality Child Care (Rudd & Macklin, 2007b) and announced, “it is critical that governments show leadership to ensure that high quality child care and early learning environments are in place for our children” (2007b, p. 1). Together, these documents foreshadowed what appeared to be an unprecedented focus on high-quality and universal access to ECEC services for children in the year prior to school.

Running parallel to my interest in quality were my experiences teaching undergraduate students in an early childhood education degree program at CSU. My lecturing responsibilities included subjects about teacher education, ECEC policies and early childhood service provision. I recalled a moment while lecturing to a group of first-year undergraduate students when I was challenged to make connections between present-day ECEC policy developments and past policy developments. The moment occurred as I outlined a history of Australian ECEC from the early 1900s. I sensed detached expressions on the faces of my students. At that time, Prime Minister John Howard had led a conservative Coalition Government in Australia for 11 years. I paused and asked my students if they could remember a time when [then] Prime Minister Howard had not been in government. In a group of approximately 70 students,
one student raised her hand. It was at that moment that I realised that my own curiosity about quality in ECEC policy was connected to my lived experience of policy from the recent past. But this lecture, and others like it, contributed to making connections between past and present-day policy developments. I hoped that assisting students to develop understandings of policy histories would enhance their understandings of contemporary early childhood education (Krieg, 2010). In a sense, my study was brought about by an interest in examining past policy in order to develop deeper understandings of how quality is understood and enacted in present-day ECEC policies.

My doctoral study traces how the concept of quality has been constructed in Australian ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009. This period [1972 – 2009] has been construed in this study as the recent past. Bennett (2004) describes the recent past as ‘dead ground’ that is frequently overlooked because of its proximity to the present. Further, in Australian ECEC policy history, the recent past constitutes a time of rapid and transformative policy developments for the early childhood sector. As such, this period represents an important site for investigations of policy concerning quality in ECEC.

The starting point for the study was the introduction of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) [the Act]. Prior to 1972, few long day care centres existed (Brennan, 1998). While the Act did not explicitly refer to quality, it implicitly promoted quality by linking funding to the employment of qualified staff and providing capital and recurrent grants to non-profit long day care centres. The end point for the study was the introduction of the National Early Childhood Development Strategy [the Strategy] (COAG, 2009) when quality became a centrepiece of significant national early childhood reforms. Yet, an analysis of policy documents alone tends to belie the complexity of policy making processes. By combining an analysis of policy documents and transcripts from
interviews with key policy actors, referred to in this thesis as policy elites, I problematise multiple discourses that construct quality at particular eras in ECEC policy history. This approach draws together complex interactions between social, political and economic events and processes in policy developments for over almost 40 years.

These policy developments have evolved in response to the changing social and economic needs of Australian society. They have been characterised by the provision of a range of service types for young children and by the introduction of a range of legislative and regulatory requirements. In general, these requirements have been divided between three layers of government: the Commonwealth Government, sometimes referred to as the Federal Government; six State and two Territory Governments; and local governments established within each state and territory. Prior to 2007, each layer had some responsibility for ECEC provision across Australia, resulting in a multi-layered and multi-jurisdictional approach to policy development and funding provisions. However, between 2007 and 2013 the Council of Australian Government (COAG) introduced major policy reforms to bring together all states and territories in a nationally consistent approach to improving the quality of ECEC services (Brennan & Adamson, 2012). In my study, all policy documents analysed refer to key ECEC policy reforms implemented by the Commonwealth government.

**Aims of the study**

The aims of the study reported in this thesis were to:

- Critically examine constructions of quality in Australian centre-based long day care between 1972 and 2009.
- Highlight discourses that shape those constructions of quality.
• Identify how policy making processes and events in the recent past have shaped understandings of quality.

**Research questions**

The primary research question investigated was:

1. *How has quality been constructed in government policy concerning centre-based long day care in Australia between 1972 and 2009?*

Additional sub-questions were:

2. *How have constructions of quality been produced through discourses? Why?*


4. *Are there discourses that are prominent, seemingly secondary or silenced? Why?*

**Significance of the study**

For over a decade, global organisations that extend beyond national borders have provided advice on ECEC to individual countries. These large scale intergovernmental organisations, for example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the European Union (EU) provide reports and systematic reviews that promote policies aimed broadly at improving the life chances of people around the world (Campbell-Barr & Leeson, 2016). For example, the OECD has produced four thematic reviews of Early Childhood Education and Care since 2001, the Starting Strong series (OECD, 2001, 2006, 2012, 2015). These reports offer international
comparisons, policy orientations and advice for establishing systems aimed at providing ECEC services. Collectively, all four reports called for increased attention to quality in ECEC. This attention has been underpinned by a burgeoning interest in investment in ECEC to improve children’s life chances.

In the research literature, broad academic commentary suggests rationales for investment in ECEC are often premised on political agendas regularly driven by socio-economic concerns (Moss & Urban, 2010). These concerns often encompass a desire to increase parental workforce participation rates and simultaneously resolve work and family responsibilities, particularly for mothers of young children. Investment rationales, along with a general consensus in the research literature, associate quality with well-qualified and experienced staff in ECEC services (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Van Laere, Lazzari, & Peeters, 2012). However, as Urban et al., (2012) point out, in order to foster quality in ECEC services, investment rationales need to support professional autonomy at all levels of an ECEC system. For instance, they assert that support for professional autonomy should encompass holistic approaches that go beyond a focus on training and individualised conceptions of ECEC. They argue that ECEC systems must develop mutually beneficial relationships between every layer of an ECEC system for quality to be effective (Urban et al., 2012).

Quality is a pivotal issue in ECEC because it has implications for children’s development and early childhood pedagogy, and has been shown to have benefits for society (Dalli et al., 2011; Vandell, Blesky, Burchinal, Steinberg & Vanderfrifft, 2010; Galinsky, 2006). Yet it is a term that is widely used, taken for granted, and often loosely defined (Ishimine & Tayler, 2014). Because it is used in such diverse ways for so many different purposes, it is subject to shifting meanings. Numerous assumptions and an eclectic mix of philosophical beliefs and perspectives contribute to different
understandings of quality (Dalli et al., 2011). Therefore, arriving at a broadly accepted
definition of quality is inherently difficult and has resulted in much debate. This study
aims to contribute to deeper and more nuanced understandings of quality and ways for
thinking differently about quality in present-day policy developments.

Several notable studies have examined contemporary and/or historical
constructions of Australian ECEC policy (see for example, Brennan, 1998; Kelly, 1989;
Wong, 2006). These studies have made valuable contributions to the history of
Australian ECEC. A growing number of studies have examined constructions of quality
within contemporary Australian ECEC policy (see for example, Fenech, Giugni &
Bown, 2012; Jackson 2015a; 2015b; Press, 2010). These studies have also provided
valuable critiques of Australian ECEC policy in recent times. A small number of studies
have examined historical conceptualisations of quality in Australian ECEC (see for
example, Fenech, 2011) and one study deployed a genealogical approach to investigate
the discourse of the quality reforms in Australian ECEC policy for over two decades
prior to and during the COAG reforms [1980 – 2006; 2007 – 2009], (see for example,
Hunkin, 2016). My study commences earlier, with the introduction of the Child Care
Act 1972 (Cth), and utilises a suite of theoretical tools to critically examine how quality
has been constructed in Australian ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009.

Internationally, definitions of early childhood refer to the birth – eight years age
range (UNESCO, 2016). However, ECEC services most commonly cater to children
prior to school (OECD, 2015). My study focuses on quality in relation to Australian
long day care (LDC) services. These services usually cater for children from birth to
five years. In the Australian context this focus is significant as LDC is the dominant
LDC encourages workforce participation and fosters the development of children (Rush,
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014), 55% of children between birth and four years attended some form of child care. Of these children, 31% attended LDC.

More broadly, the study contributes historical perspectives to a corpus of research about quality that collectively provides a growing evidence base for Australian ECEC policy developments. It makes a contribution to the research literature by eliciting insights from leading figures, described as elite informants, about policy intent and processes (see Part Two, Table 2 for a description of elite informants who participated in this study). By mapping these elite informant insights against key policy documents the study makes a contribution to knowledge about the evolution of constructions of quality and the complexity of policy making processes.

Initially, I conducted a thematic analysis of policy documents and transcripts from elite interviews. However, this method of analysis appeared inadequate for making visible discourses that construct meanings of quality in ECEC policy. Accordingly, I overlaid my textual analysis with a discourse analysis by utilising Bacchi’s (2009) ‘What’s the problem represented to be? (WPR)’ approach to policy analysis. This approach moved beyond the identification of multiple themes of quality to focus on how multiple discourses construct quality at particular moments in ECEC policy history. Multiple discourses and path dependencies were evident across the period of investigation [1972 – 2009]. I conclude this thesis by discussing how three prominent discourses and two critical junctures brought about effects that privilege certain ways of thinking about quality over others. This approach draws together complex interactions between social, political and economic events and processes in policy developments for almost 40 years (for an explanation of the terms discourse, critical juncture and path
dependency please refer to an explanation of key terms at the beginning of this thesis (p. xxi – xxiv).

Overview of the research project, methodological approaches and analytic strategies

This study is informed by a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present (Foucault, 1977) and Pierson’s (2004, 2005) perspectives of policy history. My theoretical framework incorporates a version of historical discourse analysis and also draws on concepts of path dependency and related notions of critical junctures. As such, the study does not attempt to present a purely Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis. Rather, it draws on theoretical perspectives of a history of the present (Foucault, 1977) and policy history (Pierson, 2004) to enable new perspectives to be explored. Initially, I had intended to conduct a Foucauldian genealogy, however, for reasons outlined in the Postscript to Article Three, I moved away from a purely Foucauldian approach. In the study, I argue, that the complexity of policy histories calls for a range of methods and methodologies (Logan, Sumsion & Press, 2014) in order to understand how discourses embedded within policy texts and policy making processes construct meanings of quality in ECEC policy in particular ways. A purely Foucauldian approach would focus in greater depth on the reflective and constitutive potentiality of discourse regarding the positioning of subjects.

Both approaches adopt historical perspectives but differ around ideas of causality and contingency. For Foucault, the concept of causality is limited (O’Farrell, 2005). Instead, Foucault prefers the term ‘conditions of possibilities’ to refer to complex arrays of events that are “many and imposing” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49) and may occur simultaneously in any given period of time and for which causes may never be known.
Pierson is also concerned with unexpected consequences but is particularly interested in the accumulation of causes. While I draw loosely on Pierson’s perspectives in this study, I suggest that previous policy decisions influence the paths of subsequent policy decisions but do not necessarily determine them.

Both Foucault and Pierson are interested in describing practices that lead to change. Foucault mentions he is writing ‘a history of the present’ (Foucault, 1977) to consider contemporary practices in relation to the history of these practices. As Castel (1994, p. 244) explains, “‘history of the present’ enables history to take a double look back. It sheds light on how contemporary practices function, showing that they continue to be structured by the effects of their heritage”. Central to Foucault’s approach to history is an understanding of discourse as, “a set of statements that belong to a single system of formation” (1972, p. 121). This understanding is inherently connected to the idea that discourse is more than language and texts alone. Discourse can be thought of as, “practices for producing meaning, forming subjects and regulating conduct within particular societies and institutions at particular historical times” (MacLure, 2003, p. 175). In relation to policy developments, discourse can be seen, on the one hand, as having constitutive power and, on the other hand, as being an interactive process whereby policy is constructed through communicating ideas, values and interactions between particular groups or individuals.

Pierson’s approach draws on a theoretical argument connected to ideas of path dependency, “in which choices made in the past systematically constrain the choices open in the future” (Myles & Pierson, 2001, p. 306). Although I draw on ideas of path dependency throughout the study, I do not make assumptions about a set of linear, predetermined consequences from policy making processes as political path dependency is complex and lacks easily measurable indicators. As such, it is an emerging and
incomplete approach (Pierson, 2004). However, this approach is useful to draw attention to the importance of timing and sequencing of events. For example, Aron (1961, pp. 16-17 as cited in Pierson, 2004, p. 57) explains:

A man [sic] takes the same walk every day. On one occasion a heavy tile becomes dislodged from a building along his route. Depending upon the particular timing of these two streams of activity (strolling man, falling tile), the observed outcome will be radically different. If the two streams of activity produce a ‘conjuncture’ the result is calamitous.

Examining ‘big’ events, such as a national economic crisis, as well as ‘little’ ones such as a falling tile, highlights how a multiplicity of diverse factors contribute to policy change as, “little ones that happen at the right time can have major consequences as well” (Pierson, 2000, p. 263). In this study, concepts of path dependency are drawn upon to offer explanations for policy developments that play out over considerable periods of time (Pierson, 2005). In doing so, I draw on an interpretation of path dependency that enables understandings of multiple events and processes that can lead to major policy change and new discourses that arise in connection with these changes. To reiterate, this approach provides meeting points for the influences of macro-contextual factors such as ‘big’ social, political and economic dynamics, and particular discourses influencing policy developments in ECEC.

**A point of explanation about quality**

Structural and process features of quality are well documented in the research literature (Fenech, 2011; Mashburn et al., 2008; OECD, 2012; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). Examples of structural features include staff education and training, group sizes and adult-child ratios. Process features refer to aspects of the environment that are less easily measured by regulation, for example, teacher-child interactions (Cassidy et al.,
2005; Melhuish & Petrogiannis, 2006). These features are important, yet quality remains a complex and abstract concept (Duignan, 2005).

Moss (2016) argues that a long-standing problem associated with providing a precise definition of quality is that quality is a relative concept. He asserts that meanings of quality stem from particular theoretical perspectives and ways of thinking about the world. One perspective, described by Moss as a “paradigm of modernity,” (2016, p. 10) constructs quality as an objective concept based on ‘value-free knowledge’. This paradigm shapes quality as quantifiable and measurable with little attention, if any, to context. Other perspectives acknowledge that meanings of quality stem from different theoretical positions such as poststructuralism, post-humanism and post-colonialism (Jones, Osgood, Homes & Urban, 2016). They challenge views that quality can be objective and value-free, claiming instead that quality is a subjective concept, understood from multiple perspectives and subject to multiple interpretations.

From poststructuralist perspectives, arriving at a broadly accepted definition of quality is inherently difficult and has resulted in much debate (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Ishimine, Tayler & Bennett, 2010). For these reasons I consider quality from multiple perspectives, including Duignan’s ‘possible perspectives’ of quality noted as:

Quality as perfection - the achievement of consistent, flawless outcomes attainable by all;

Quality as exceptional - something special or distinctive - relative to notions of excellence and unattainable by most;

Quality as fitness for purpose - meeting specific needs or desires;

Quality as value for money - giving a good return on investment;
Quality as a transformation - change and improvement e.g. in terms of service provision or professional practice;

Quality as accountability e.g. ensuring child welfare, safety (DJELR, 2002, p. 31, as cited in Duignan, 2005, p. 215).

For reasons explained above, this study does not attempt to provide a precise definition of quality as doing so would be counter-productive to the aims of the study and the poststructural perspectives on which the study is based.

**Thesis outline**

The thesis is about how meanings of quality have been constructed within the context of Australian ECEC policy. The term ‘constructed’ can have at least two meanings. One meaning relates to how policy is made. A second meaning relates to how language, power and knowledge operate as part of discourse in the creation of meaning. It is this second meaning that is the focus of this thesis.

The thesis reports on a study that examined Australian ECEC policy history to identify how meanings of quality have been shaped in the recent past. As such, the thesis is not about policy making processes in relation to a widely accepted definition of quality, nor about the politics of ECEC policy making. Instead, it is about how meanings of quality are constructed within ECEC policy rather than how policy is made.

In order to examine how meanings of quality are constructed within ECEC policy, it is necessary to include some discussion of policy making processes, especially in relation to the inner workings of government and the role of advocacy groups in bringing issues of quality to the fore. These discussions focus on how different emphases within policy shape meanings of quality in particular ways. In this sense, the
thesis differs from other theses (e.g., Bradley, 2011) that focus on ECEC policy making processes and emphasise the action and activity of policy making.

The thesis comprises a series of six journal articles that are connected by an exegesis. Consequently, each journal article reflects different referencing styles and minor changes in the spelling of some key words, such as childcare or child care and policy making, policymaking or policy-making, according to the publishing requirements of each journal. Some information, for instance, details of the study and methodological approaches, has been unavoidably repeated.

The articles were written at different stages of my part-time doctoral candidature. Five of the six articles have been published in peer-reviewed journals, whilst a sixth article is in press. Statements confirming my original contribution to the authorship of each article have been included (please refer to pp.ix – xiv). The thesis is organised in six parts, which are outlined in the following section.

**Structure of the thesis**

**Part One** contextualises the study. It contains this Introduction, Article One and a postscript. Article One – *The quality imperative: Tracing the rise of ‘quality’ in Australian early childhood education and care policy* (Logan, Press & Sumsion, 2012) – reviews the literature concerning quality in ECEC and outlines the Australian policy context for the period under investigation [1972 – 2009]. This article highlights increasing attention to quality in Australian ECEC policy history from 1972, culminating at the end point of the study in 2009. It suggests the use of tools, such as discourses and gazes, can be used to make policy shifts concerning quality more visible. In the postscript following the article, I discuss why the notion of a political gaze was superseded as the study proceeded.
Part Two outlines the methodology taken in the study. It contains an introduction to the methodology and outlines my use of a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present and how I draw on Pierson’s approach to policy history. This part outlines methodological considerations, data sources, methods of data generation and data analysis processes. Further, I discuss challenges encountered while conducting my data analysis and conclude this section with a discussion of ethical considerations.

Part Three comprises an introduction, Article Two – Uncovering hidden dimensions of Australian early childhood policy history: Insights from interviews with policy ‘elites’ (Logan, Sumision & Press, 2014) – and a postscript. Article Two provides a detailed account of the use of elite interviews, a frequently overlooked methodology in investigations of ECEC policy. This article highlights the contributions that elite interviews can make to deepening understandings of policy making processes. The postscript following Article Two contains my personal reflective account of conducting elite interviews.

Part Four comprises an introduction, Article Three – The Child Care Act 1972: A critical juncture in Australian ECEC and the emergence of ‘quality’ (Logan, Sumision & Press, 2013) – and a postscript. Article Three forms a starting point for the study with an analysis of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) [the Act]. It builds on concepts in Article One, arguing that discourses construct ‘quality’ in multiple and discursive ways. Further, it identifies path dependent processes represented in discourses, the Act as a critical juncture in Australian ECEC policy development and the significance of the Act in establishing quality as a key policy consideration. In the postscript that follows Article Three, I briefly report on an aspect of my analysis of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) that was not previously reported in Article Three, that is, the presence of community discourses. Then, I foreshadow the significance of community discourses
and explain why I take up this discussion, in more detail, later in the thesis (in Part Seven). Last, I discuss why I moved away from my original intention to conduct a Foucauldian genealogy to a looser more inventive Foucauldian-influenced history of the present. This approach enabled me to focus in-depth on three historical eras between 1972 and 2009, that is, the early 1970s; early 1990s and late 2000s.

Part Five comprises an introduction, Articles Four and Five. In Article Four – The shaping of Australian early childhood education and care: What can we learn from a critical juncture? (Logan, Press & Sumsion, 2016) – I provide an analysis of policies and elite interview transcripts that focus on the era of the early 1990s leading up to the implementation of Australia’s first Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) [1994 – 2011] for child care. This article builds on the methodology used in Article Two and Article Three and identifies another critical juncture in ECEC policy. It sheds light on connections between this critical juncture, how the rise of market discourses constructed quality, and the context in which quality became mandated and understood in contemporary Australian ECEC policy.


2 The term era is used to describe “a period of time marked by distinctive character, events, etc” (Macquarie Dictionary, n.d.)
designed to improve quality in ECEC. In this article, I discuss why I remoulded my previous conceptualisation of a critical juncture, from Articles Three and Four, to include a focus on ideational change. The emergence of discourses of investment in stronger standards and qualified staff, in endeavouring to strengthen quality, is discussed.

**Part Six** comprises additional analysis from the elite interviews. It reports on analyses of data from the interview transcripts that referred to time periods that either fell outside the three historical eras identified in Articles Three, Four and Five, or were less directly related to the policy changes in these eras.

**Part Seven** comprises an introduction and Article Six – *Tensions in constructions of quality in Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy history* (Logan, In press, accepted January 22, 2016). Article Six looks back to 1972 and identifies three prominent discourses that play out across the entire period of the study [1972 – 2009]. This article briefly updates the literature about quality from Article One and highlights how some discourses have endured and remained prominent while others have seemingly faded away.

**Part Eight** comprises the Conclusion that draws together the findings from the thesis and contributions of the thesis to existing policy studies. In addition, I highlight the limitations of the study and suggest possible future research directions. In drawing the thesis to a close, I argue the importance of the recent past as an opportunity for policy learning and a site for greater critique and analysis of underpinning assumptions, ideologies and complexities of quality in ECEC policy. In doing so, I articulate an argument for how high-quality might be improved and sustained in future ECEC policies.
Legislation

Child Care Act 1972 (Cth).

References


Article One – The quality imperative: Tracing the rise of ‘quality’ in Australian early childhood education and care policy.

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

Helen Logan
Frances Press
Jennifer Summion
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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, 2008). 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) and May’s (2007) use of gazing 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 conceptualize 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.

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 (Somek, 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, Peschold, Karras, Clare & 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, 2000). 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, Scar, McCartney & Abbott-Shim,
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2000; Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1999), 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 & Petropoulos, 2008) 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 (De Silva & Wise, 2006), teachers (Logan & Sumson, 2010; Singer & Miltenburg, 1994) and children (Einarsdottir, 2005; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), or a combination of these groups (Cegielski, 2004; Katz, 1992). As Logan and Sumson (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, 1999; 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 in ECEC (Preco, 1990, 2006; Press & Woodrow, 2005, 2009; Sumson, 2005, 2006; Sumson & Goodfellow, 2009) and studies highlighting inadvertent consequences of the Australian ECEC regulatory system (Fenech & Sumson, 2007; Fenech, Sumson & Goodfellow, 2006). An official history tracing the establishment of Australia’s childcare accreditation from its early beginnings in the 1980s 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 Dalli & Moss, 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 Kjorholt & 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 Saggars (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, 2008). 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 (Allwood, 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, 1996). 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, 1998); 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, 1989).

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.


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. xii) 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, Taylor & 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., 2008).
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 escalated the privatization trend’ (Sumison, 2006, p. 101). A stream of research warning of the dangers of relying primarily on market models to ensure quality (Press & Woodrow, 2009; Sumison & 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 childcare 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 multidimensional 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 social 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 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’ (Allwood, 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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Key events</th>
<th>Relationship to quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972–1983</td>
<td>The Child Care Act (1972)</td>
<td>Quality is linked to funding the establishment of non-profit long day care centres and the employment of qualified staff in these centres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Accord (1983i)</td>
<td>Child care considered part of the social wage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984–1993</td>
<td>Section 11 of Child Care Act – repealed (1985)</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Operational subsidies removed from non-profit long day care centres (1997)</td>
<td>Removal of operational subsidies from non-profit long day care centres renders these centres less able to afford qualified staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OECD Background report for Australia (2000)</td>
<td>Calls for a national focus to address the provision of good quality child care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rapid expansion of corporate long day care</td>
<td>Calls for increased numbers of qualified staff and ways to ensure and improve quality regardless of service auspice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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

Laura McFarland-Piazza, Charles Sturt University

Alison Lord, Charles Sturt University

Melissa Smith, Charles Sturt University

Belinda Downey, Charles Darwin University.
Postscript to Article One

After writing Article One, I began to reconsider the usefulness of the political gaze (May, 2007) as a tool for analysing the policy issues that were becoming prominent in my study. Originally, I had intended to use the concept of the political gaze as a way of categorising discourses in order to make shifts in government policy concerning quality more visible. However, as I became deeply immersed in my data, I became aware of a small number of key policy shifts across the period of investigation [1972 – 2009]. These shifts appeared connected to broad social, political and economic dynamics that coalesced at brief moments, described in my study as key historical eras, followed by long stretches of incremental policy change. It was this interest that prompted me to consider the use of other approaches to understand the complexities in policy developments. My interest turned toward investigating how the coalescing and timing of these dynamics, in particular historical eras, brought about dramatic policy shifts that shaped constructions of quality in ECEC. Ball (2006, p. 17-18) explains “There are of course temporal aspects to the processes of policy and policy analysis but in practice most education policy research lacks any sense of time. The most obvious aspect of this neglect is a rampant ahistoricism.” A realisation that my research could be considered somewhat ahistorical caused me to turn my attention to concepts of path dependency and related notions of critical junctures. In this study, these concepts assumed a greater utility than the political gaze in explaining dramatic moments of policy change interspersed with periods of incremental policy developments arising from my data analysis.
References


Part Two: Methodology
Introduction to the methodology

In Part Two, I present an overview of the methodology of the study, which was designed to investigate constructions of quality in Australian ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009. This section begins with an explanation of the methodological approaches that guided the study. I first explain my use of multiple historical perspectives and why these perspectives were drawn upon in the study. Then, I describe my data sources and how the data were selected, generated and analysed. I then discuss some of the challenges I encountered while conducting my data analysis. Finally, I address some preliminary ethical considerations and signal my intention to elaborate on these considerations in Part Three.

Methodology

My approaches are influenced by perspectives of poststructuralism and historical institutionalism. Both poststructuralism and historical institutionalism are well known conceptual approaches to studying public policy. They both explore how meanings shape policy decisions but differ in how they understand and explain the meanings that are attributed to policy decisions. A poststructuralist approach was employed that drew on a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present. For example, a feature of poststructuralism is a rejection of positivist ideas underpinned by scientific and rational premises of the ways truth and knowledge are constructed (Hatch, 2002). Yet as Fenech (2011, p. 28) notes, for the most part, conceptualisations of quality ECEC are “grounded in a positivist paradigm”. In order to explore constructions of quality in ECEC policy over several decades, I maintain that it is important to explore constructions from multiple historical perspectives. Historical institutionalism provides another approach for studying processes of social and political change. A feature of historical
institutionalism is its flexibility. It is an approach that has been used to highlight the particular ways in which policy choices matter over periods of time (Steinmo, 2008). Pierson’s perspective of policy history is drawn from a historical institutionalist approach that is concerned with why some policy choices, at particular points in time, affect choices at subsequent points in time. It emphasises conditions and the timing of macro-contextual factors that shape the trajectory of policy paths. It includes the role of institutions in shaping behaviour, that is, who participates in policy decisions and their behaviour in making those decisions. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, this study is influenced by two approaches to history: a history of the present (Foucault, 1977) and Pierson’s (2004; 2005) perspectives of policy history. This study draws on these approaches to contribute multiple perspectives for understanding how quality has been constructed in government policy concerning ECEC.

History of the present

A history of the present is an approach to historical analysis. Foucault (1977) uses the phrase ‘a history of the present’ to consider contemporary problems in relation to their history. Originally, I had intended to conduct a Foucauldian genealogy, however, for reasons outlined in the Postscript to Article Three, I moved away from a Foucauldian genealogy to a looser Foucauldian-influenced history of the present. A core theme of a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present is Foucault’s perspective on discourse, power and knowledge. This perspective identifies how meanings are given to particular concepts elaborated in discourse.

Discourse

Foucault explains that “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it”
My use of the term discourse derives from Foucault’s understanding that power is connected with social relations. As Mills (2004, p. 17) further explains, “power is dispersed throughout social relations, that it produces possible forms of behaviour as well as restricting behaviour.” This is particularly relevant for government policy analysis. For instance, as Somekh and Lewin (2005, p. 99) note, “the notion of discourse draws attention to the idea that power works through institutionalized discursive hierarchies in which some policy discourses are treated as ‘truths’ while more radical perspectives are marginalized.” Thus, in relation to policy developments, discourse can be regarded as, on the one hand, having constitutive power and, on the other hand, as being an interactive process whereby policy is constructed through the communication of ideas, values and interactions between particular groups or individuals. In this sense, Foucault’s analysis of power is concerned with how discourses work in ways to produce something else.

Foucault explains that discourses work together to overlap, compete and contradict at any given time (Foucault, 1972). This process is referred to by Foucault as “discursive formation” (Foucault, 1972, p. 121). Both discourses and discursive formations deal with groups of statements that produce similar effects. My use of Foucauldian perspectives of discourse refers to the following three premises. First, discourses are discursive formations of shifts in meanings that change over time. The use of language within discourse is not neutral and implies particular shades of meaning, such as meanings attributed to quality. Second, subjects are represented in certain ways within discourses which normalize conduct. For instance, the rise of market discourses can work in ways to normalise the behaviour of parents as consumers of child care. Third, societal institutions of governance operate according to discourses constituted in particular ways. Here, the power of discourse can act as an instrument of
governmentality. These understandings of discourse, discursive formations and power are used in this study to help understand how meanings of quality have been produced, what circumstances give shape to them and whose interests are served.

*A Foucauldian-influenced history of the present*

My use of a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present examines the way discourses work in constitutive ways and are part of interactive policy making processes. By examining why certain discourses in policy concerning ECEC construct quality in particular ways, it is possible to open space for thinking about new and alternative meanings of quality.

Pierson’s approach (2004; 2005) to policy history provides a contrast to a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present and a complementarity. In adopting Pierson’s approach, I juxtapose and suggest points of connection between the accumulation of events and processes that can lead to dramatic policy change. Foucault searches for discontinuities or breaks in historical events that see time in a fragmentary way (Mills, 2003). Pierson is interested in the temporal sequencing and accumulation of events that lead to dramatic moments of policy change (Pierson, 2004). I contrast Pierson’s approach with Foucault’s interest in the discursive effects and constitutive power of discourses (Foucault, 1972). In doing so, I provide a way of highlighting discontinuities within and between discourses and an accumulation of macro-contextual factors that contribute to influences on policy trajectories.

*Policy history*

Pierson’s approach to policy history (Pierson, 2004; 2005) is a version of historical institutionalism, which constitutes an approach to studies of policy development over considerable periods of time. As previously mentioned in the
Introduction, this approach focuses on ‘big’ social, political and economic dynamics, referred to as macro-contextual factors, and at times incorporates micro-contextual factors, such as the moves of policy actors as part of policy making processes (Pierson, 2005). This approach relies on a theoretical argument of causation, connected to ideas of path dependency, “in which choices made in the past systematically constrain the choices open in the future” (Myles & Pierson, 2001, p. 306). I draw loosely on ideas of path dependency and suggest that previous policy decisions influence the paths of subsequent policy decisions rather than determine them. I do not intend to imply the existence of one continuous path but rather multiple paths that emerge at particular times and are constituted within discourse.

Concepts of path dependency and discourse are interrelated, as path dependency can highlight emerging and recurring discourses that shape policy events. I did not delve into the complexities of path dependent theory but instead drew on the concept to expand my thinking about how quality has been framed within policy developments concerning ECEC policy history. As Ball (2007, p. 6) explains, political responses and policy narratives are “critically mediated through new discourses and [which] are also specific and path dependent within particular political, cultural and accumulation histories.” Accordingly, I have drawn on ideas of path dependency and the related notion of critical junctures to explain how the coalescing of macro-contextual factors, such as social, political and economic dynamics, has led to new discourses that shape the concept of quality in policy documents concerning ECEC. In doing so, I do not claim to examine path dependent processes of change but highlight their temporal relationship with prominent discourses.

The study of path dependency and critical junctures has been applied variously (Collier & Collier, 1991; Myles & Pierson, 2001; Pierson, 2004). These concepts have
been widely used to explain institutional change but have received less attention in relation to policy studies (Pierson, 2004). However, Pierson (2004) suggests they also have application for studies of policy development. More recently, this application has been identified by Scheiwe and Willekens (2009) in their historical comparative approach to institutional and policy change for childcare and preschool development in Europe.

In conceptualising a critical juncture, I synthesised the work of others (see for example, Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Gal & Bargal, 2002; Hogan & Doyle, 2007; Pierson, 2004; Scheiwe & Willekens, 2009). Initially, I drew on three key elements broadly supported in this range of literature. First, an intense period of political uncertainty; second, a “major digression” from previous policy; and third, “lasting impact on subsequent decisions and structures” (Gal & Bargal, 2002, p. 432). These elements were drawn upon to highlight the impact of social, political and economic dynamics that influence constructs of quality in policy concerning ECEC in three historical eras – the early 1970s, the early 1990s and late 2000s – across the period of investigation [1972 – 2009]. These eras are identified respectively in Articles Three, Four and Five. As my study developed, I became aware of new literature concerning a fourth element of critical junctures: an element of ideational change (Hogan & Doyle, 2009). This element was subsequently added to the previous three elements in the conceptualisation of a potential critical juncture in Article Five.

**Data sources**

The study drew on two main data sources: key policy documents, and transcripts from interviews with elite informants. Logue (2009), uses a similar approach in her
study of international donor agencies. She explains the usefulness of several data sources to further inform debates about policy issues from multiple perspectives.

In the document analysis component of the study, I drew on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) distinction between the terms 'data corpus' and 'data set'. The term 'data corpus' refers to the large range of documents initially selected that identified historical and political issues pertaining to the research question (see Appendix 8). The term 'data set' refers to a subset of key policy documents from the data corpus selected for in-depth analysis. In the interview component of the study, data comprised the transcripts of semi-structured individual interviews with elite informants. Data derived from both policy related documents and elite interviews enabled the drawing together of public representations of policy with specialised knowledge of policy making processes to create enriched understandings of the contexts which shaped constructions of quality in ECEC policy.

Data corpus

In developing my data corpus, I drew from several broad policy and historical sources. The important policy analyses conducted by Brennan (1998); Hill, Pocock and Elliot (2007); Press (2006); Press and Hayes (2000); and Wong (2006; 2007), identified key historical and political events (for example, changes to legislation and government reports affecting the provision of child care between 1972 and 2009). These analyses provided a useful starting point for developing my preliminary mapping document (see Appendix 7). From these analyses, as well as data base searches of government archives and the publications of peak non-government early childhood organisations active in promoting policy issues, I developed my data corpus (see Appendix 8).
My selection of documents that comprised my data corpus, was further informed by advice from the elite informants who participated in my study and assisted in avoiding unintended omissions of important data. The final data corpus consisted of: 48 policy documents comprising legislation, official government policy documents and advocacy documents; and 152 policy translation documents comprising a sector-specific layer of policy written by peak national and state early childhood bodies.

Many policy documents that comprised the data corpus were publicly available, however, access to policy translation documents, not publicly available, was obtained by seeking permission to access the archives of peak national and state early childhood bodies. For an example of the Information Sheet provided seeking access to archived policy translation documents, see Appendix 5. The sizeable data corpus informed the selection of key policy documents for the data set.

Data set

To be included in the data set, key policy documents were required to meet at least one of the following criteria (phrased as guiding questions):

- Are they key government documents that are expressions of government policy?
- Are they documents that have been publicly available and have sought to influence government policy?
- Are they representative of the views of a particularly influential organisation?

For example, Early Childhood Australia (ECA), Australian Community Children’s Services (formerly known as the National Association of Community Based Children’s Services (NACBCS)), Community Child Care Co-operative (CCCCC).
Does the document mention quality?

Is the document a legislative expression of policy? For example, the *Child Care Act 1972* (Cth) or a legislative embodiment of policy?

Documents selected for inclusion in the data set were grouped according to:

- Legislation
- Official government policy documents
- Documents from advocacy groups or influential organisations
- Transcripts of individual interviews with elite informants

To assist in managing the data, the data set was further divided into three brief historical eras: the early 1970s; early 1990s; and late 2000s. A description of the policy documents selected for analysis can be found below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Policy documents analysed in the study.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Set</th>
<th>Type of document</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Historical era (Article in which it is discussed)</th>
<th>Number of pages in document (including appendices)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972 Second Reading Speech (Cth)</td>
<td>Parliamentary Bill for an Act</td>
<td>A legislative embodiment of Commonwealth Government policy designed to inform the parliament for discussion on the</td>
<td>Early 1970s (Article Three)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Accreditation of Early Childhood Services in Australia: Report to inform government</td>
<td>Report to inform government</td>
<td>A government commissioned report to detail the                                                                ächte Einführung in die frühkindliche Bildung.</td>
<td>Early 1990s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Title</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Date Range</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A report prepared for the Department of Health, Housing and Community Services (Wangmann 1991)</td>
<td>Policy possible structure and contents of a child care accreditation system.</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Interim Report to the Minister for Aged, Family and Health Services (Interim National Child Care Accreditation Council June 1992)</strong></td>
<td>Report to inform government policy A government commissioned report to develop a national child care accreditation system.</td>
<td>Early 1990s (Article Four)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9. Towards a</strong></td>
<td>Discussion A commissioned</td>
<td>Late 2000s</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elite informants

A second data source was the transcripts of individual interviews with elite informants. Prospective elite informants were identified on the basis of their involvement in policy making circles, and references to them in the research literature surrounding ECEC policy development, policy documents, and/or their active involvement in peak early childhood bodies. My knowledge of early childhood professional networks also proved to be an advantage in locating and gaining access to several elite informants. Many potential informants had retired or were no longer active in policy making circles but were still well-known through early childhood professional networks.

In order to determine an appropriate number of informants for the study I drew on the research literature about elite interviews (Dexter, 1970; Lilleker, 2003; Harvey, 2010, 2011; Mikecz, 2012). This literature suggests interviewers should aim for a sufficient number of participants to reflect different perspectives of policy developments for any given investigation. I did not have a finite number of participants in mind but
aimed to recruit informants whose active experiences in policy making circles reflected a range of perspectives about policy making processes and spanned the period of investigation [1972 – 2009].

The elite informants were recruited by a letter providing a brief overview of the study and an invitation to be part of the research (see Appendix 2 for Invitational letter and Appendix 3 for Participant information form). If a response to the invitation had not been received within two weeks, a follow-up reminder email was sent. A total of 17 invitations were sent and 13 acceptances were received. I conducted 12 individual interviews in person and one interview via telephone (see Appendix 4 for Participant consent form). The decision to conduct the telephone interview overcame constraints associated with travel as conducting this interview in person would have involved travelling large distances. Interviews averaged one hour in length, ranging between 50 minutes and one hour and 20 minutes duration. Each interview was recorded, with permission, using an MP3 device. The interviews were conducted weekly between March 15, 2011 and June 22, 2011 to allow time for transcription in the days following the interview and time to reflect on the transcript prior to conducting the next interview. A description of elite informants and a brief overview of their professional experiences is outlined below in Table 2. The descriptions were drawn from various professional websites but not referenced so that informants are not easily identified.

Table 2: A description of elite informants interviewed as part of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms of policy elite informants</th>
<th>Period of professional activity in policy making circles</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Early 1970s – present</td>
<td>Former academic and Chief Executive Officer of a large ECEC organisation and State and Commonwealth Government policy advisor during the development of the COAG reforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Late 1970s – present</td>
<td>Former academic and senior State and Commonwealth Government policy advisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Late 1980s – late 1990s</td>
<td>Former union official active in policy making circles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Rebecca</td>
<td>Early 1990s – present</td>
<td>Former Chief Executive Officer of a large ECEC governing body.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data generation**

*Ky policy documents*

Data generation included an analysis of key policy documents included in the data set, such as legislation, official government policy documents and documents from advocacy groups or influential organisations. These documents were drawn from the data corpus and used to understand the policy context in which concerns about quality were constructed. Drawing on policy documents and transcripts from elite interviews enabled me to generate a different picture from studies that draw on policy documents alone.

*Semi-structured elite interviews*

Semi-structured elite interviews seemed the most appropriate form of interview for generating rich data, given they can provide greater flexibility and clarification of meaning than structured interviews permit (Darlington, 2002). My decision to utilise semi-structured interviews was based on the notion that this flexibility would give me access to specialised knowledge of policy making contexts (Dexter, 1970). They seemed to offer a means to explore valuable sources of knowledge, based on elite
informants’ first-hand policy making experiences, about the inner workings of policy making processes that were unavailable from policy documents alone. I anticipated this knowledge would lead to a deep awareness of the contexts of policy production.

I prepared for the interviews by trialling my list of guiding questions. This preparation enabled me to become more adept at interviewing. I used a list of guiding questions to keep the interviews focussed but was flexible enough to vary the questions in order to elicit rich responses from my informants. For a list of my guiding questions, see Appendix 6. Throughout each interview, I endeavoured to develop a conversational tone, yet retain some structure. My intent was to provide opportunities for elite informants to convey their first-hand experiences of how policy making processes and events shaped understandings of quality in ECEC policy. For an example of how I mapped my interview questions to my research questions for the study, see Appendix 9.

After each interview I recorded my reflective thoughts and kept these in a separate file for future reference. I transcribed eight interviews, while another five interviews were transcribed with the assistance of a transcription service because of time constraints (a total of 428 transcribed pages). I read each transcription and checked it against its audio recording for accuracy. Each individual transcript was returned to their informant for member reflection (Tracy, 2010). Opportunities for member reflections allowed each elite informant time to refer to their professional records and access additional data or elaborate further on events discussed during the interview. These processes, albeit time consuming, enabled informants to check the accuracy of their memory of events. Further, it enabled me to compare different informants’ accounts of the same event with the text-based literature contained in the data corpus. Even though it is impossible to gain full insight into policy making processes, these accounts helped enrich understandings of the contexts of policy production and the
differing perspectives, values and ideological stances of elite informants involved in those contexts.

**Data analysis**

NVIVO was initially used to organise, manage and code the interview transcripts. The functions in NVIVO were used to code ‘nodes’ (Bazeley, 2007) to identify small sections of text related to concepts, key words and debates about quality. As I immersed myself in the coding of transcripts several tree nodes were developed. A tree node represented a sub-category of a node. An example of the preliminary coding of nodes and tree nodes can be found in Appendix 10. During the data coding process data chunks that seemed important or insightful were often starting points for identifying themes within the data. For example, text coded at the metaphor node led to the identification of a preliminary theme of internecine warfare, as discussed Article Two.

As I began to work across the policy documents and interview transcripts, a process of thematic analysis was undertaken (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify themes that represented repeated ideas in the policy documents. Sections of the text were selected if they either mentioned the term quality or were implicitly connected to notions of quality. For example, references to the importance of qualified staff for positive child outcomes was considered an implicit connection to quality. These sections – whether sentences, phrases or paragraphs – were read repeatedly to identify patterns in the data. I coded chunks of data into sub-themes. As multiple sub-themes were identified I clustered them into common themes. As Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 82) explain, a theme constitutes “something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within a data set”. This process involved repeated readings of the data, moving backwards and
forwards between interview transcripts and policy documents. This flexible approach to data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) proved useful as it enabled me to map connections between, across and within the data sources. An example of the sub-themes and themes identified across the data set can be found in Appendix 11. Bringing together analyses from policy documents and interview transcripts is a way of including a rich diversity of perspectives and ensuring credibility of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data were analysed for underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations and ideologies relating to quality (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Next, I applied a ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach to data analysis (Bacchi, 2009). This approach draws attention to the way policy problems are elaborated in discourse. Foucault explains, “... discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is more that renders them irreducible to language (langue) and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe” (1972, p. 54). In order to describe this ‘more’ in my data analysis, I applied Bacchi’s questions to the data. Ball (2015), critiques the use of studies that claim a version of Foucauldian discourse analysis where the focus of the study is “text and language rather than discourse” (p. 311). My approach emphasised the way power and knowledge are joined together in discourse. This approach facilitated making connections between, across and within multiple texts. The questions used in applying Bacchi’s WPR approach (2009, p. 2) to my data are detailed below as:

- What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in a specific policy?
- What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representation of the ‘problem’?
- How has the representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
• What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? What are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?

• What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?

• How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, replaced?

The application of Bacchi’s six key questions in a WPR approach (Bacchi, 2009) engages in a form of discourse analysis that is particularly useful for analysing how meanings of quality are constructed in ECEC policy. It draws attention to discourses as “socially produced forms of knowledge that set limits upon what it is possible to think, write or speak about a given social object or practice” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 35). This approach draws on Foucauldian perspectives that highlight how power and knowledge work in ways to make things happen. Where a policy is constructed to address a policy problem, there is an assumption that a problem needs to be solved. Bacchi (2009, p. x) notes “the presumption that the purpose of policy is to solve ‘social problems’ remains a grounding premise in most approaches to policy analysis.” Yet, as Bacchi (2009, p. x) further explains, this presumption can be considered erroneous when policies “give shape to ‘problems’; [but] they do not address them.” For example, when a lack of quality, in ECEC is represented as a problem that constrains parental workforce participation, it constructs quality as a problem to be solved in order to achieve future economic gains. But this construction detracts from other meanings of quality for children’s learning in the here and now. Thus, particular discourses set up binaries, in this case between the future needs of the economy and the present-day needs of children.
In using a WPR approach to policy analysis I questioned “the way policy ‘problems’ are often made to appear as discrete and self-evident” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 54) and examined how meanings of quality are embedded within policies. This level of data analysis has enabled me to step back from the minutiae of coding and thematic analysis and apply Bacchi’s six questions (Bacchi, 2009) to interrogate the data more broadly by identifying categories, key concepts, binaries and discourses operating within policy.

In conducting my analysis, my intention was not to discredit policies or policy making decisions but rather to consider the conditions that have shaped their representations and where possible highlight alternate representations. MacLure (2003, p. 79) notes this kind of analysis can be used to interrupt “the flat pronouncement of common sense or polemic [and] offers a new kind of agency to teachers, students and researchers, by providing resources for asking how particular interests and views are stitched up in texts.” An example of my analytical processes of data analysis utilising Bacchi’s (2009) WPR approach to policy analysis can be found in Appendix 11, pp. 270-273.

**Analytical challenges**

As I immersed myself in the processes of data analysis, I encountered several challenges. The first challenge was a tendency to judge the past based on present-day understandings. This tendency, known as presentism (Castel, 1994), involves using present day perspectives to interpret the past. To avoid the dangers of presentism, I adhered to three approaches in my data analysis. First, I read widely from policy documents and other historical accounts, such as the accounts of elite informants, from prior to, across and after the period of investigation [1972 – 2009]. Second, I focussed
closely on the questions posed in my data analysis to deepen understandings about the role of policy and the contexts in which policy documents were written. This focus was reflected in changes I made to my preliminary data analysis. By refining my thinking about my use of analytical processes, I expanded the number of columns in my revised data analysis table. I also changed the type of questions I asked of my data from ‘how’ questions to ‘why’ questions. Third, I engaged in processes of researcher reflexivity. Brew (1998, p.32) encourages processes of researcher reflexivity by suggesting the researcher look and then “look again and again” and “go round the experiential research cycle.” Accordingly, I adopted these processes of engaging repeatedly in the research cycle in order to deepen my understandings (Brew, 1998). These three approaches, also outlined in Article Three, guarded against bringing present-day assumptions to bear on the past. For an example of my preliminary and revised analytical data processes, refer to Appendix 13.

A second challenge involved my engagement in processes of researcher reflexivity. This engagement caused me to consider the values and meanings I brought to the processes of data analysis. Was my interest in teacher education potentially compromising? I wondered whether my position as a teacher educator at a university, influenced the meanings I attributed to quality. Did my analyses potentially serve the needs of the institution in which I was employed? Was I unaware of the power of discourses operating in the world in which I worked? (Foucault, 1985). Was I ‘unconsciously’ implicated in the ‘knowledge’ my research would produce? Bacchi (2009, p. 236) explains “it is this ‘unconscious’ involvement that makes research reflexivity so necessary and so very difficult.” As a way to help counter these difficulties I kept a folder of notes, questions and commentary about my feelings and thoughts as I continued to immerse myself in the data in each phase of data analysis.
These comments and moments of reflection and self-reflection assisted me to make sense of the data. They helped me to make sense of my own biases and reflect on why I had chosen to engage in this study and why I had chosen it now. I endeavoured to show my reactions and reflexive considerations in the postscripts to articles throughout the thesis, as occasioned their use.

A third challenge was the analysis of historical accounts as problematisations. Problematisations can differ from other historical accounts based on the same information. They construct another historical account that reads differently but must also be compatible with these other accounts. Thus, problematisations based on historical data present challenges for researchers as their co-existence with other historical accounts can itself be a problem (Castel, 1994).

**Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations were met by addressing the requirements for interviewing human participants as outlined by the Charles Sturt University Ethics in Human Research Committee. Charles Sturt University’s ethical requirements are in keeping with the National Statement on Ethical Research Involving Humans (National Health and Medical Research Council, 1999) which emphasise that the use of personal accounts pose potential risks to confidentiality for participants. Interviewing the elite informants in my study posed some specific ethical considerations as many of the elite informants were either well-known public figures, well-known in early childhood policy making circles, or currently still active in political life. Anonymity and confidentiality has been maintained when reporting the data, although this was challenging given the relatively small size of early childhood policy making circles. For this reason, when transcripts of each individual interview were returned to each informant to review, I
requested that they consider the degree of self-identification evident in their interview transcripts. Informants were also given the opportunity to further de-identify themselves if concerns of anonymity and confidentiality arose. A total of 11 of the 13 informants were quoted across the five articles that drew on the interviews with elite informants. In Article Two, which follows, I elaborate on the benefits and challenges of elite interviewing. In the postscript following Article Two, I provide a reflective account of my experiences of elite interviewing.

References


*Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 8*(2), 144-156.
Part Three: Insights from interviews with policy ‘elites’
Preamble to Article Two

In Part Three, I discuss how the use of elite interviews, while challenging, can open possibilities for more informed policy critique. Lilleker (2003), explains that relying solely on interviews can have limitations but add richness to policy investigations through the additional insights they provide. In Article Two that follows, I elaborate on what elite interviews can tell us and what they probably can’t tell us. This article draws on an example of the sacred and secret canopy (Cockcroft, 2005) to illustrate the compromise, personal risk and ethical constraints experienced by the elite informants in their experiences of Australian ECEC policy making. In doing so, the article considers the use of elite interviews as a valuable methodology for investigations of ECEC policy making. In the postscript following Article Two, I provide my personal reflective account of my experiences in conducting the elite interviews in the study.

References


**Article Two** – Uncovering hidden dimensions of Australian early childhood policy history: Insights from interviews with policy ‘elites’.

Uncovering hidden dimensions of Australian early childhood policy history: insights from interviews with policy ‘elites’

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ABSTRACT: This article considers the value of elite interviews as a frequently overlooked methodology in investigations of policymaking in early childhood education and care (ECEC). We contextualise the discussion within a study that examines constructions of quality in Australian ECEC policymaking between 1972 and 2009. We conclude that, despite their limitations, the use of elite interviews can enhance understandings of the complexity surrounding policymaking processes.


RESUMEN: Este artículo considera el valor de las entrevistas de élite como una metodología frecuentemente consultada en las investigaciones para el diseño de políticas en la Educación y Atención de la Primera Infancia (EAPI). Nosotros contextualizamos la discusión en un estudio que examina las construcciones del concepto de calidad en las políticas australianas de EAPI entre 1972 y 2009. Nuestra conclusión es que, a pesar de sus limitaciones, el uso de las entrevistas de élite puede promover la comprensión de la complejidad alrededor de los procesos de diseño de políticas.

Keywords: elite interviews; policy; policy elites; early childhood education and care (ECEC)

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Introduction

Public representations of policy and policymaking processes can obscure the multiplicity of influences that are exercised upon policy and the many layers of policymaking hidden from public view (Bradley 2011). Moreover, as Rigby, Tarrant and Neuman (2007, 106) suggest 'instrumental or distributive features of policy ... tend ... to obscure the fact that underlying these policy positions are ideas, interests and values'. Our premise in this article is that understanding the complexity of policymaking processes can lead to deeper awareness of how and why policies are shaped the way they are, thus enhancing possibilities for informed policy critique and democratic participation in policymaking processes.

The aim of the article is to consider the value of elite interviews as a means of gaining insight into the multiplicity of influences on policy and to uncover the less easily detectable layers of early childhood (EC) policy development. What beliefs, ideas, and strategies, for example, do elites employ in their involvement in policymaking? Whose ideas and values are represented and how are they represented? We are particularly interested in what elite informants can and cannot tell us about how policymaking takes place.

The article consists of four parts. We begin by briefly explaining what we mean by elite interviews and elite informants. Then we highlight the complexity of early childhood education and care (ECEC) policymaking with reference to recent studies that, collectively, have employed a rich array of conceptual tools to explain and portray that complexity. We argue that as well as diverse conceptual tools we need to employ a diverse range of methods to investigate influences on policymaking. In the third part of the article, we briefly review studies of policymaking in education, and ECEC more specifically, that have utilised elite interviews, which we suggest remains an under-utilised method. In the fourth and final part of the article, we draw on research methodology literature and, in illustration, on a current Australian study to consider what elite informants might be able to tell us and what they probably cannot tell us about ECEC policymaking.

What are elite interviews and who are elite informants?

Elite interviews are interviews with 'the influential, the prominent and the well-informed' (Dexter 1970, 19). Likewise, Lilleker (2003, 207) notes 'elites can be loosely defined as those with close proximity to power or policymaking.' We use the term elite to refer to high profile personnel who have had access to specialised knowledge and power and provide valuable policy information. While 'elite' can convey suggestions of superiority, we adopt Harvey's explanation:

In many cases, it is not necessarily the figureheads or leaders of organisations who have the greatest claim to elite status, but those who hold important social networks, social capital and strategic positions within social structures because they are able to exert influence. (2011, 433)

In our study, which examines constructions of quality in Australian ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009, and which we discuss in more detail later in the article, the elite informants, also referred to as policy elites, include current and former senior bureaucrats (five), current and former academics (four) and key professionals representing the EC sector (four).
The 13 informants were selected on the basis of their involvement in policymaking circles; references to them in the research literature concerning ECEC policy; and/or their involvement in peak EC bodies. They constituted two categories of informants: firstly, well known public figures and secondly, influential but lower profile figures whose names generally do not appear in the research literature concerning Australian ECEC policy development but are well-known through EC professional networks. Before briefly reviewing studies that have incorporated elite interviews, we draw attention to the complexity of EC policymaking.

The complexity of early childhood policymaking

A diverse range of concepts has been employed in conceptualising and historicising the complexities of EC policymaking and policy development more broadly. Take, for example, the concept of path dependency, and closely related concepts of institutional stickiness and critical junctures in policy development. According to Myles & Pierson (as cited in Scheiwe and Willekens 2009, 2) path dependency results from processes in ‘which choices made in the past systematically constrain the choices open in the future’.

The extent to which path dependency processes can influence the direction of EC policy development has been identified in several European contexts. For instance, Willekens (2009) identifies the development of preschool institutions in Belgium as a key example of path dependency. The expansion of Belgium preschools was partly an ‘off-shoot’ of the complex historical struggles between church and state. Children’s attendance at either church or state-based preschools was perceived as an entry point for children’s lifelong commitment and allegiance to beliefs and values underpinning church or state-based institutions. Willekens (2009) describes this dynamic, which had widespread approval from the broader population, as establishing a path dependency that shaped the development of subsequent preschool institutions. It led to a systematic increase in the number of preschools across Belgium which was both church based and state based.

Policy decisions influenced by path dependent processes that lead to incremental changes in policy design rather than macro policy reform have been described as institutional stickiness (Scheiwe and Willekens 2009). Bradley (2011) identifies examples of institutional stickiness in the Irish ECEC context. For example, the Irish government’s decision between 2000 and 2007 to stimulate the development of ECEC services by providing capital grants to the private sector was a decision that has been difficult to reverse. Furthermore, the decision is likely to lead to the provision of ongoing funding to the private sector in subsequent Irish ECEC policymaking.

Although path-dependent processes are often used to explain the historical development of policy (Scheiwe and Willekens 2009), these processes are sometimes punctuated by turning points, or critical junctures that alter the path of policy design. Borchorst (2009), for example, illuminates the role of policy elites in critical junctures that shaped Danish EC policy reform, such as the 1964 reform, a key historical turning point that generated an increased public commitment to childcare.

We argue that along with concepts such as path dependency, institutional stickiness and critical junctures, the complexity of policy histories calls for a range of methodologies and methods to enhance understandings of policymaking processes. Similarly, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) highlight the usefulness of multiple sources of data in connecting ‘the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of policy practice or implementation, to capture the interactive, synergistic
set of relationships between these contexts'. Elite interviews can assist in connecting these contexts as the following brief review of empirical literature concerning policy elites and their influence in the educational policy arena generally, and in ECEC policy, reveals. Offering insights into how policy elites have resisted, promoted or experienced change in policy development contributes to deepening understandings of policy development (Bradley 2011). Nevertheless, elite interviews remain an under-utilised method.

**A brief literature review of studies using elite interviews**

In recent years there has been a growing interest in research focusing on the work of policy elites and their influence in policymaking processes (see for example a themed collection in the *European Educational Research Journal*, introduced by Ozga 2011). Some of this literature examines the micro-politics of educational policy production by focusing on politicians, senior bureaucrats, policy networks, researchers and the power relations that can exist amongst them. For example, Ball and Exley (2010) examine educational policy networks in the UK by mapping multiple agencies that influence policy production. They identify a re-distribution of influence on government policy with non-traditional partners playing an increasingly complex role. The following studies provide further insight into these trends but with a particular emphasis on policy elites’ influence in educational policy.

Almost two decades ago in the UK, educational researchers Fitz and Halpin (1994) and Whitty and Edwards (1994), sought to uncover difficult to detect layers of policymaking processes by drawing on the perspectives of politicians and senior bureaucrats involved in key educational policies. These researchers’ experiential accounts illustrate the value of eliciting policy elites’ perspectives to help reconstruct the complexities and internal contradictions in policymaking processes. Similarly but more recently, researchers involved in the European KnowandPol project (e.g. Grek 2011; Neumann 2011) sought to investigate policy production from policy elites’ perspectives. In Scotland, for example, Grek (2011) examined challenges of establishing relationships with education policy elites for early career researchers. Likewise, Neumann (2011) identified how asymmetric power relations have methodological consequences when interviewing policy elites involved in education policy production in Hungary. These studies provide insight into the complexity of social processes that occur in elite interviews and into ways knowledge is mobilised in policy production.

Auto-ethnographical studies by Levin (2005) and Luke (2005), both of whom had first-hand experiences as senior educational policymakers, identify the challenges of imparting researcher knowledge bases to policy elites. In the Canadian context, Levin (2005) draws attention to policy elite’s beliefs and the role of public opinion in influencing policymaking processes. Luke’s (2005, 664) Australian insider account of crossing boundaries between academia and government draws attention to the power and ‘individual agency’ of key policy elites. Both studies found that an array of factors, such as personal beliefs, can inform policymaking decisions and call for greater reliance on research evidence.

Using a comparative case study of ECEC policies concerning France and Sweden between 1980 and 2005, Neuman (2007) investigated how the governance of ECEC shaped policy outcomes across public and private sectors. While not focusing solely on policy elites, she found that governance decisions about responsibility for ECEC privileged some policy elites’ ideas and decision-making over others. Neuman’s study
illuminates, in part, how policy elites can influence policy design and how policy design subsequently contributes to political and social constructions of ECEC.

Bradley (2011) examines how the perspectives of policy elites in Ireland influence policy decisions in complex ways. She concludes that power relations in the inner spheres of policy production, which she describes metaphorically as a ‘black box’, may work to constrain consensual systemic EC policy development. Similarly, following a review of influences on politicians’ decision-making, Bown, Sumison, and Press (2009, 2011) investigated influences on politicians’ decision-making with regard to Australian ECEC. Using ‘dark matter’ as a conceptual metaphor, they theorise normalising influences on policy production (Bown, Sumison, and Press 2011). Drawing on interviews with policy elites and politicians, they argue that matemalist discourses continue to influence politicians’ thinking and decision-making for ECEC policy in Australia, and that often these discourses, rather than power relations per se, are difficult to detect. Collectively, this small corpus of literature begins to identify the complexities of policy elites’ influence and decisions in EC policymaking processes.

In the remainder of this article we make a case for the use of elite interviews with policy elites as a valuable method for enhancing understandings of policymaking processes by uncovering difficult to detect layers of ECEC policy processes and potentially amplifying the history of policy debates. To support our case we suggest that despite the challenges involved, elite interviews can generate insights into policymaking processes that would otherwise be unattainable. To illustrate this component of the discussion we draw on research methodology literature and extracts of transcripts of interview data with policy elites from our current study to shed light on what elite interviews can and cannot tell us. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

What can elite interviews tell us?

Dexter (1970), in his seminal research, highlights how elite interviews can generate insights into policymaking processes that would otherwise be unattainable through texts alone. Interviews with elite informants involved in policymaking processes present perspectives on EC policymaking processes that are rarely reported and therefore often largely unknown. This gap can be particularly noticeable with respect to the recent past (Lagemann 2005).

Elites can complement the often one-sided representations presented in policy documents as they provide a more ‘comprehensive social picture’ (Cockcroft, 2005, 367) of policymaking processes. Yet, while the value of policy elites for providing insights into policy development is well acknowledged in the broader literature (Dexter 1970; Walford 1994a; Batteson and Ball 1995; Lilleker 2003), few studies tie the experiences and challenges of elite interviews to accounts of historical events influencing ECEC policy development.

To illustrate how elite interviews can contribute to deeper understandings of ECEC policy development we draw on two themes identified through a preliminary analysis of the elite interview transcripts from the current study. These themes – internecine warfare and the ‘quid pro quo’ (trade-off) for quality – illustrate the concepts of institutional stickiness and critical junctures in policy development. The data discussed below is derived from transcripts of interviews with two senior bureaucrats, a senior academic and a key professional representing the EC sector, from the larger group of 13 policy elites who participated in this component of the
study. The examples highlighted below draw attention to relatively unknown facets of Australian policymaking in two politically turbulent times in Australia’s EC policy development.

In 1972 the newly elected, social reformist Australian Labour government implemented The Child Care Act which enabled the Australian Commonwealth Government to take responsibility for childcare provision (Brennan 2009). In 1994, after a period of intensive lobbying, Australia introduced a childcare accreditation system. This was a ‘world first’ as participation in accreditation was linked to eligibility for ongoing government funding (Wangmann 1994). The purpose of accreditation was to ensure all long day-care centres reached a certain level of quality. While the introduction of accreditation has been well documented (e.g. Wangmann 1995; National Childcare Accreditation Council 2009), the perspectives of policy elites have largely been overlooked.

**Internecine warfare**

The introduction of the Child Care Act, shortly before the election of a new reformist government in 1972, represented a critical juncture in Australian EC policy. Within the new government, EC policy was characterised by disputes between government departments about the role of and responsibility for childcare provision. Several participants described this period as characterised by a series of ‘fights’, ‘battles’ and in one case, ‘internecine warfare’. The metaphor of ‘internecine warfare’ is conceptually useful in describing the internal battles for the control of childcare policy between government departments within the same government. The following excerpts from the data illustrate an array of disputes concerning the operationalising of childcare policy. One participant, Joyce, a former senior bureaucrat, was representative of many participants when she explained:

... immediately after the election [1972] ... another round of internecine warfare broke out as to well... we now had a childcare policy but who owned it? So there were a series of inter-departmental meetings where [the Departments of] Health and Education and what was Social Security by then and Labour and Industrial relations fought bitterly.

Another facet of these internecine disputes related to the provision of childcare subsidy. Joyce further explained:

... every time the government got close to agreeing that it would do so [provide subsidy], there was a fight between the then quite small, but nevertheless active, Education Department which said that it [childcare] was going to be about education and the Social Services Department which said no, no, no it’s about social services and the Health department which said it was about child health.

Subsequent policy disputes reinforced divisions within the EC sector. For example, the administration of childcare funding remained with the Commonwealth government and preschool funding moved to State governments from 1976 onwards. Education had long been the province of state governments. By deeming preschool as educational and therefore the responsibility of the states, we see institutional stickiness at work. Further by separating childcare from preschool, a path dependency was entrenched which was to influence the subsequent development of ECEC policy for decades to come. By highlighting how and why funding policy was shaped differently for
childcare than preschool in the Australian context, elite interviews shed light on disputes that reinforced a divided EC sector, reliant on historical divisions of care and education (Brennan 1998) and path dependent processes.

The ‘quid pro quo’ for a quality system.
The Australian political context throughout the 1980s was characterised by a chronic shortage of childcare places; concerns about the quality of childcare; increasing private sector childcare provision; and increased demand from parents and unions for childcare provision (Logan, Sumsion, and Press 2012). During this politically turbulent period, initially triggered by an agreement between the government and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) known as the Accord, the government systematically expanded Commonwealth subsidised childcare places but demand continued to outstrip supply (Brennan 1998). Policy debates concerning the supply of childcare and the quality of childcare places eventuated in a critical juncture occurring in Australian EC policy. The perspective of policy elites highlights the tensions evident between the focus on supply and the focus on quality. According to Laura:

Each election the key message would be we’re going to expand x-hundred places and that was the key thing, there was nothing about what was happening to the children in those places and that became a major interest for me because of all the research that was coming out of the States (US) … that was a real driving force for me to get some of that on the agenda … in terms of putting quality in with the [issue of] workforce participation.

The limited supply of government subsidised childcare places in the 1980s often resulted in parents using private childcare centres, many of which employed fewer qualified staff and greater numbers of staff younger than 18 years of age (Brennan 1998). Consequently, there were concerns about the quality of many private childcare services. ACTU argued that shortages of government subsidised childcare places forced many of its members, and Labour voters more generally, to use private childcare. Although ACTU was concerned about the quality of private services, it proposed that it would be inequitable to users of private childcare not to extend government funding to the private sector.

As Jane explained:

The impetus for the accreditation system was there was a lot of pressure to extend fee relief to the private sector ... that’s the genesis of it ... in a lot of areas where you would have had traditional Labor constituencies; the people were using private day care. So ... the ACTU said to the Labor government, we understand why you want to do this [extend fee relief to the private sector] and obviously a lot of our members would benefit [through access and affordability], so it wouldn’t have made sense to oppose it ... so we said the quid pro quo for us is that you bring in a quality system.

The trade-off involved extending government funding to the private sector in exchange for the introduction of an accreditation system that aimed to guarantee the quality of public and private centres. The introduction of a quality accreditation system was both important and timely. However, by framing the provision of government funding to the private sector as an equity issue to increase the supply of childcare places, discussions for the systematic provision of a universally Commonwealth funded childcare system were sidelined.
Another perspective regarding the political complexities of resolving the massive demand for childcare places was emphasised by Lisa:

... ACTU decided that Labor couldn’t go to another election without a policy that actually would deliver fee relief to the private childcare service. And what was to be the trade? The trade was to be a childcare accreditation system.

A few years prior to the introduction of an accreditation system, a fundamental shift in government policy to provide funding to the private childcare sector overshadowed aspirations for a universal Commonwealth funded childcare system. This period represented a critical juncture in the development of Australian ECEC policy. The shift in funding policy transformed the provision of Australian childcare from a predominantly non-profit community based concern to predominantly private sector provision. In addition, a policy focus on quality became entrenched as a means of addressing perceived sector differences between public and private childcare. Subsequently, we illustrate tensions and what policy elites cannot tell us by highlighting issues of positionality and drawing on a theme of the sacred and secret canopy.

What can’t elite interviews tell us?
Elite interviews can have numerous limitations including for example, problems associated with memory, power differentials between the researcher and the elite informant and differing values, ideologies and influence (Neal 1995; Lilleker 2003; Harvey 2010, 2011; Grek 2011). Positionality has been singled out as particularly challenging, especially for early career or doctoral researchers. As they do not belong to either established academic groups or policy elites, their positionality can be somewhat underdetermined and fluid (Grek 2011). In trying to establish their credibility with policy elites, researchers may potentially lose control of the direction of an interview as many policy elites are skilled at diverting attention away from themselves, avoiding answering questions or taking control of interviews (Lilleker 2003). Once control of the direction of an interview has been lost it may be difficult for less experienced researchers to regain the focus.

In contrast, Mikecz (2012, 485) points out the fluidity of a researcher’s positionality can be useful in reducing ‘the status imbalance’ during an interview. This proved to be the case in the current study where the interviews were conducted by the first author (a doctoral student who, on all almost all ‘dimensions’ of positionality, was less senior and less experienced than the policy elites she interviewed. Accordingly, she was acutely conscious that the limits of her knowledge of policy events were on show. While an atmosphere of collegiality developed in some interviews, in others she was required to establish her professional credibility. By being alert to multiple tensions surrounding her researcher positionality, she managed to maintain rapport and researcher credibility while navigating well-known dangers, such as taking on the stances of policy elites (Grek 2011). While researcher positionality presented many challenges in the current study, knowledge of political sensitivities and thoroughly researching, prior to each interview, publicly available information about each policy elite’s involvement in policymaking processes contributed to the success of each interview.

Although challenges associated with discrepant interviewer-interviewee positionality can limit the information obtained and insights gleaned through elite interviews, in
this section, we focus on the limitations of compromise, personal risk and ethical constraints experienced by policy elites, in what we refer to as an example of the sacred and secret canopy (Cockcroft 2005). What can be said and what must remain unspoken presents a challenge for elite informants as well as interviewers. While these constraints may be considered a taken for granted aspect of political life, the following interview excerpts, highlight the personal risk, compromise, tensions and disempowering consequences for policy elites arising from the effects of the sacred and secret canopy. Cockcroft (2005) suggests the sacred canopy may serve to mask practices or alternatively to mystify mundane practices. The end result is that transparency is partial, leading to one-sided accounts of policy development.

**Sacred and secret canopy**

Policy elites in the current study explained they had wanted to share their experiences of a turbulent and important time in Australian ECEC policy development; however, underpinning a desire to share their stories were tensions concerning what could and could not be said on the public record. While many policy elites in the current study gave detailed accounts of their experiences, several requested that certain sensitive information be taken off the public record. Cockcroft (2005, 370) conceptualises this cloaking of information as the ‘sacred canopy’.

Tensions surrounding the sacred/secret canopy in policy development for the Australian accreditation system were articulated by Laura. She pointed out that it was forbidden to speak openly of shifts and changes in key government reports, even when policy recommendations were overturned by government:

> It [the report] didn’t get out there. I mean it’s not that it’s not public, I’ve got the report there but once it got quashed in cabinet, then what came out was yes, yes, yes, we’re supporting accreditation and we’re going to have an accreditation system. So then the early childhood field got very enthusiastic because we’d won [ha... laughs resignedly] ... according to how people saw it in the field...we actually were now going to have an accreditation system and this is where I really did spit the dummy and [name withheld] hauled me aside and said ‘look get a percentage of something up and then change it’ but I knew we’d never be able to change it.

These comments highlight a disillusioning predicament: the cloaking of information and lack of public discussion that closed down scope for the implementation of an alternative accreditation system and a final result that, for some EC professionals, fell short of expectations. Although she did not use the term, Barbara also articulated tensions surrounding the secrecy of the sacred canopy for ECEC policy elites:

> ... often you’re bound to confidentiality around certain things...so you can’t take it back, yet supposedly you’re representing a membership so you have to look at ways about how you can put the general thrust into the public arena without prejudicing the confidentiality clause you’ve signed up to...so yes, an interesting challenge.

Barbara went on to reflect on the constraints and cumulative disillusioning effects of experiencing the sacred and secret canopy over many years. She commented:

> You can see government doing it now. They’ve got the reference group and they’re not allowed to share anything. So I just say to politicians and bureaucrats well you’re not truly consulting because you’re talking to individual people. You can’t
say you’re talking to the organisation because they’re [the reference group] not allowed to talk to us and share it.

Conclusion
This article has illustrated that while there can be challenges in managing elite interviews, exploring previously untold perspectives of elite informants’ involvement in ECEC policymaking processes can lead to deeper understandings of how and why ECEC policies have been shaped. The perspectives of elite informants can also amplify historical policy debates. We have highlighted an underpinning absence of unified Australian ECEC policy development and disempowering consequences for policy elites. In particular, three themes identified through a preliminary analysis of elite interview data point to the presence of path dependent processes. They also shed light on a critical juncture in Australian ECEC policy and highlight the compromise, personal risk and ethical constraints experienced by some policy elites. The findings provide points of connection with larger historical studies undertaken in Europe, as documented by Scheiwe and Willekens (2009). Moreover, the complexities of path dependent processes draw attention to the importance of thinking about how and why policies have been framed, the difficulties that may be created for some groups by these framings and how critical junctures change the path of policy development and present policy problems in particular ways (Bacchi 2009).
Elite interviewing, as a research method warrants further exploration in EC policy research for it appears to have potential to open up possibilities for greater levels of debate, more informed policy critique, and increased participation in democratic policymaking processes.

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Note
1. Long day-care centres often cater for children from birth to school age. They are open for a minimum of eight hours per day, five days per week and operate for a minimum of 48 weeks per year (Press and Hayes 2000).

References


Postscript to Article Two

In this postscript to Article Two, I reflect on my personal experiences of elite interviewing and recount some of the joys and challenges I encountered throughout the interviewing process. My experience of elite interviewing resonated with some of the well-known challenges identified in the research literature (see for example, Dexter, 1970; Harvey, 2010, 2011; Lilleker, 2003). They included locating and contacting elite informants, travelling long distances and scheduling interviews, ‘off the record’ comments, informant memories of past events and going public with the data. Some of these challenges were intensified by the relatively small size of early childhood policy making circles (Logan, Sumsion & Press, 2014). Despite these challenges, conducting the elite interviews was for the most part an extremely valuable and rewarding experience.

Locating and contacting elite informants

In the early phases of my doctoral study, locating and contacting my prospective elite informants proved difficult. Several informants had either retired from public life or had moved to other positions and were no longer contactable. Internet search engines and early childhood networks were particularly useful in locating participants. Once contact had been made, the acceptance rate to invitations to participate in the study was high. As previously mentioned, a total of 17 invitational emails were sent and 13 acceptances received. Lilleker (2003), explains response rates are generally higher if informants are retired as they may have little to lose by telling their experiences.

On several occasions I was invited to conduct interviews in elite informants’ homes. I was aware of the influence interview settings can have on how an interview proceeds (King & Horrocks, 2010). On each occasion I found the mood to be convivial
and the informants often provided morning tea or lunch. These occasions were characterised by a calm and private atmosphere in which the informants appeared relaxed. On other occasions, I was invited to meet at local cafes, workplace offices or other public venues. These meeting points required me to make quick evaluations of the suitability of each venue for the purposes of maintaining a relaxed yet professional tone while obtaining an audible recording of the interview. Throughout each interview I was aware of the time and generosity of spirit afforded to me by each informant. In keeping with this generosity, I endeavoured to maintain a courteous and informed approach to each interview.

*Travelling long distances and scheduling interviews*

All interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to each informant. Yet, at times, this was challenging as it required me to travel long distances and schedule the interviews accordingly. On several occasions I travelled up to 1000 kilometres and arranged overnight accommodation to conduct interviews at convenient times and locations for informants. Given these challenges, recruitment and interviews were conducted over a six month period. In order to alleviate these challenges, I sought special study leave from Charles Sturt University which released me from my usual lecturing duties between February and June, 2011.

*The ‘off the record’ comments*

Throughout the interviews, several elite informants revealed sensitive information about their experiences in policy making processes. These remarks were often related to the inner workings of policy making circles. They included information about deals done behind closed doors and what could be referred to as informants’ observations of political ‘back stabbing’. At times, informants divulged controversial
information including references to influential public figures such as retired senior public servants, politicians, former ministers and former prime ministers. Although these examples were extreme and occurred in a small number of the interviews, remarks containing confidential and controversial information are not necessarily unusual (Lilleker, 2003). Not surprisingly, these remarks were preceded by comments such as ‘but this is off the record’. I was acutely aware of the sensitive nature of these remarks, particularly given these comments could otherwise be considered libellous. Yet, at the same time, I was also unprepared for these remarks. They raised tensions for me concerning what interview details could be divulged and what must remain undisclosed. These tensions meant that I needed to grapple with issues such as: To what extent might these remarks influence my data analysis? How can I record data raised by these remarks and still abide by the ethical requirements of my study? As I was duty-bound by the ethical requirements of my study, I have abided by these requirements. For these reasons, the ‘off the record’ comments remain undisclosed. However, as noted in Article Two, I discuss how issues surrounding what can and can’t be said on the public record also raised tensions for the elite informants in my study.

Informant memories of past events

The elite informants in the study reflected on their policy making experiences over several decades and highlighted less easily detectable layers of policy development. Conversely, these reflections also raised a number of potential concerns regarding elite informants’ memories of past events. While the elite informants in my study did not appear to engage in falsehoods, I was aware that problems associated with memory can be used to favour an informant’s stance on particular issues. On one hand, informants constructed recollections of past events in ways that justified their stance on previous issues and policy making decisions (Lilleker, 2003). On the other hand, these
different recollections and interpretations prompted me to reflect deeply on the complexity of policy making events and processes that would otherwise be left unrecorded. In order to contextualise these elite informants’ perspectives, I set about becoming familiar with other historical accounts of the same events. Being familiar with other accounts helped me to develop understandings about why these informants perceived the same issue in different ways. Despite these potential concerns, the elite interviews provided valuable opportunities to record information that would otherwise be lost over time.

**Going public**

A personal challenge closely connected to informants’ memories of past events involved going public with my data. In Articles Two, Three, Four, Five and Six, I refer to specific extracts from elite informant interviews. This data highlights the different perspectives each informant brought to the development of ECEC policy rationales concerning quality. In each instance, I gave careful consideration to the use of pseudonyms and the description of each informant, (see Part Two, Table 2 for an anonymous description of each elite informant who participated in the study). Yet, going public with data from relatively small policy making circles can be challenging. On two occasions, I made conference presentations where an elite informant who had participated in my study was present in the audience. Presenting sections of my data at conferences where well-known early childhood figures were in attendance was somewhat confronting, although I regarded the presence of these informants as a sign of interest and support for my study. These experiences reinforced the importance of maintaining ethical and respectful accounts when reporting data from interviews with elite informants.
References


Part Four: The Child Care Act 1972 (Cth)
Preamble to Article Three

Article Three provides an analysis of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) [the Act]. As previously noted in the Introduction, the Act forms a starting point for the study. This starting point was selected for two key reasons. First, the Act enabled the Commonwealth government’s provision of ‘large-scale’ funding for child care in Australia (Brennan & Adamson, 2012). Second, it implicitly promoted quality through funding linked to the employment of qualified staff and the provision of capital and recurrent grants to non-profit long day care centres. In Article Three, I provide a review of literature and commentary about the Act and highlight tensions and critiques surrounding the Act and the era in which it was introduced. In doing so, Article Three highlights the significance of the Act as a critical juncture in the development of Australian ECEC policy and in establishing quality as a key policy consideration. It elaborates on the Australian child care policy context in the early 1970s, as outlined in Article One, and highlights discourses that construct ‘quality’ in multiple and discursive ways. It also highlights the existence of path dependent processes in Australian ECEC policy.

References

**Article Three** – The Child Care Act 1972: A critical juncture in Australian ECEC and the emergence of ‘quality’


The Child Care Act 1972: A critical juncture in Australian ECEC and the emergence of ‘quality’

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Introduction

This article illuminates the significance of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth) in the development of Australian ECEC policy in two ways. First, we argue that it created a critical juncture in the development of Australian ECEC policy and, second, that it established quality as a key policy consideration in ways that still resonate in contemporary policy. By critical juncture, we mean a particular period in which key factors coalesce to create a turning point in policy. Gal and Bargal (2002, p. 432) explain that critical junctures are periods ‘during which decisions taken not only reflect major digressions from previous policies but also have a lasting impact upon subsequent decisions and structures’. Informed by Foucault’s use of a history of the present, we present findings from an analysis of the Child Care Act 1972 that highlight dominant discourses and path-dependent processes as both enabling and constraining for quality in child care and the development of a national ECEC sector.

We commence with a brief explanation of the Child Care Act 1972 and the political context surrounding its introduction. Then, we review research and commentary about the Act before explaining the methodology and methods of data analysis used in our study. Drawing from a doctoral study that is investigating constructions of quality in Australian ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009, we then explain why we believe the period surrounding the Child Care Act 1972 constituted a critical juncture in ECEC policy. We conclude by highlighting dominant discourses and elements of path dependency that signify the Child Care Act as an important historical moment in establishing quality as a key policy consideration for Australian ECEC.

The Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth)

The Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth) (the Act) was introduced by the McMahon Liberal-Country Party government at a time of political instability and social change. Shortly after the Act was enacted, the Liberal-Country Party government lost the Commonwealth election after 23 years in office. The incoming Whitlam Labor Party government (1972–1975) swept to power with promises of radical social and educational policy reform and undertook responsibility for the Act’s implementation.

The Act contained legislation for ‘the beginning of the Commonwealth government’s large-scale involvement’ in funding Australian child care (Brennan & Adamson, 2012, p. 257). Although the Act was introduced primarily to facilitate women’s workforce participation, its content reflected an understanding that government intervention was necessary to address the quality of child care. Since the legislation of the Act, child care has become an intrinsic...
part of the Australian social policy landscape, supporting women’s workforce participation and changing parents’ expectations regarding the availability of children’s care and education services. In the following section we review literature and commentary about the Act.

A review of research literature and commentary about the Act

A small corpus of literature has emerged in the 40 or so years since the Act came into operation. In reviewing that literature, we focus primarily on three interrelated lines of discussion: the significance of the Act, and tensions in discourses surrounding the Act.

Significance

As research literature and broader commentary about the Act identifies, it was significant in at least three key ways. First, it provided a legislative basis for Commonwealth intervention in child care (Wangmann, 1995). In doing so, it enabled the government to develop a national childcare system which provided access to government-subsidised child care for children from families of all income groups. The legislation moved the issue of child care from a private concern to a public concern and established a premise for publicly funded child care in Australia.

Second, the Act acknowledged that substantial Commonwealth Government intervention was required for the provision of high-quality child care (Brennan, 1998; Wangmann, 1995). Prior to the introduction of the Act in 1972, high-quality child care had either been unavailable or unaffordable for many Australian families (Brennan, 1998). The Act explicitly promoted factors contributing to quality, such as funding for the development of approved childcare facilities and encouraging the employment of staff with qualifications related to early childhood education and health. While not without its limitations, the Act was progressive at a time when research about the factors contributing to, and the effects of, high-quality early childhood programs was only beginning to emerge.

Third, the Act provided an impetus for the growth of the early childhood profession and the demand for grants for ongoing research into child care. Historically, many kindergarten and nursery teachers had been educated at independent philanthropic colleges. From the mid-1970s onwards, early childhood teacher education programs moved from independent colleges to government-sponsored teacher education programs (Brennan, 1998); in other words, from the periphery of independent tertiary education colleges to mainstream teacher education programs. This move expanded the range of early childhood tertiary courses available and made it possible to study early childhood education from certificate to postgraduate level.

Although the Act was widely recognised as highly significant, its implementation was not without criticism, even by those who were broadly supportive of its intent. The implementation of the Act highlighted philosophical differences among childcare interest groups. Furthermore, critiques pointed to inadequate features of the Act.

Tensions and critiques

Although Commonwealth funds for child care were welcomed by early childhood professionals and feminist groups, much of the literature reviewed highlights the philosophical differences among professional organisations, feminist groups and community groups that were accentuated during the early roll-out of the Act. For example, feminist critics questioned the appropriateness of requiring preschool teacher qualifications, as specified in the Act, for childcare staff. In the late 1960s many preschool teachers, strongly influenced by the work of John Bowlby, opposed young children attending child care (Brennan, 1998). Not surprisingly, these views were considered unacceptable by feminist groups who regarded child care as appropriate for young children and necessary for women’s rights to undertake paid employment (Brennan, 1998). Feminist groups focused on lobbying government to increase the supply of childcare places while professional organisations, such as the Australian Pre-School Association (APA), emphasised the importance of the employment of qualified staff and advocated for funding to be directed to preschool education (Australian Pre-School Association, 1970). Competing emphases on the supply, quality and type of service provision, and contention concerning the relative merits of child care or preschool education, complicated the development of a national childcare system.

Critical commentators also argued the Act had several inadequacies. For example, a number of critics considered the Act contained features that did not encourage women’s workforce participation. Rigg (1972) explained that the income threshold for access to government-subsidised fees was so low it excluded many low-income families. These families were forced to pay either full childcare costs at government-subsidised centres or use costly commercial centres. Consequently, for many low-income families above the threshold, childcare costs led to a disincentive for women to work. Similarly, Spearitt (1973, p. 29) argued the Act did not support working parents with middle incomes because the stringent means test virtually excluded those with both parents working. Furthermore, critics commented on the limited capacity of the Act to provide a range of childcare options. For example, while the Act was considered a positive step towards providing publicly funded child care, it did not provide for other flexible childcare options because it restricted funding to non-profit, centre-based long day care (Brennan & Adamson, 2012).
Both the Act and the Whitlam era (1972-1975) have been identified as a ‘turning point’ in childcare policies (Brennan & Wales, 1982; Brennan & Adamson, 2012) which we assert can be described as a critical juncture that also encompasses an important historical moment in the emergence of quality in early childhood policy development. However, before we take up these assertions, we explain the methodological understandings that shaped the first author’s analysis of the Child Care Act 1972. We highlight some challenges presented by this type of study. In particular, we discuss the dangers of presentism and ways we sought to guard against them.

Theoretical framework

Government policy documents are constituted by dominant discourses and heterogeneous path-dependent processes (Ball, 2008). This study is informed by Foucauldian notions of genealogy and a history of the present (Foucault, 1977). A genealogy presents a view of history that traces how discourses work in ways to produce conditions for the development of common understandings. The analysis of the Child Care Act reported here highlights the relationships that operate in converging discourses to shape constructions of quality in Australian ECEC in particular ways. In using the term discourse, we adopt MacLure’s explanation of discourse as ‘practices for producing meaning, forming subjects and regulating conduct within particular societies and institutions at particular historical times’ (2003, p. 175). We also draw on concepts of path dependency to suggest influences that reinforce the development of policies along specific policy paths (Myles & Pierson, 2001). Rather than delving into the complexities of path-dependent theory, we draw on Ball’s (2007, p. 6) explanation that policy ideas and events involve ‘a set of trends ... which are critically mediated through new discourses and which are specific and path-dependent within particular political, cultural and accumulation histories.’ This explanation is relevant for discourse analyses as discourses have constitutive power that constrain decisions in policy-making processes and thus influence policy paths taken (Ball, 2007).

Historical analyses can provide new insights into present-day concerns but we caution against an inclination to judge the past on present-day knowledge. This inclination represents a dangerous projection that is commonly referred to as presentism (Castel, 1994). In order to guard against this danger, we adhered to three approaches. First, reading widely from policy documents and other historical accounts from the period prior to and after 1972 was crucial, as focusing on a single event can limit understandings of what preceded the event and what came after. Second, focusing closely on questions posed in our data analysis deepened our understandings about the role of policy and the contexts in which policy documents were written. For example, questions such as: ‘Why was there a focus on quality in terms of physical arrangements and qualified staff at the time [1972]?’ and ‘In what ways does policy enactment for the provision of quality reinforce some constructions of quality while other constructions are seemingly marginalised?’ Third, processes of researcher reflexivity encouraged repeated engagement with the data. As Brew (1998, p. 32) suggests these processes involve going ‘round the experiential research cycle progressively deepening our understanding’. By adhering to these principles we endeavoured to guard against bringing present-day concerns and assumptions to bear on the past.

In approaching the study as a history of the present, we have drawn on similar material to other historical accounts of Australian ECEC policy (see for example, Brennan, 1998; Alwood, 2002; Wong, 2006) but focused our attention specifically on constructs of quality in child care. The study presents an account that is respectful of, and consistent with, existing accounts but uses different methodological tools than most previous accounts. In doing so, we do not imply that the concept of quality ECEC did not exist prior to 1972 but rather, that policies provide us with a medium to observe shifts in constructions of quality. We have looked back to understand how past ‘truths’ of quality in ECEC came to be represented in particular ways. This kind of study maps the conditions of power that shaped constructions of quality at particular times and the inconsistencies and disparities that exist within these multiple constructions.

Methods

‘Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended’ Ball (1994, p. 10). To understand the text of policy as well as its intent and enactment we drew upon key government documents and transcripts from selected in-depth interviews with policy elites for our analysis. The key documents referred to in this article are the House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972 Second Reading Speech (Cwlth) and the Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth); and transcripts from individual elite interviews undertaken as part of the doctoral study (Logan, in progress). These documents were selected from a broader corpus of policy documents examined for the study. The analysis reported here also draws on excerpts from transcripts of interviews with policy elites undertaken as part of the study. The policy elites were selected on the basis of their active involvement in policy-making circles and/or peak early childhood bodies from the time the Act was enacted. They include senior bureaucrats, academics and key professionals with specialised knowledge of policy-making processes (for further details, see Logan, Sumison & Press, in press). Pseudonyms are used throughout when referring to commentary from policy elites.
As we have argued elsewhere, ‘the complexity of policy histories calls for a range of methodologies and methods to enhance understandings of policy making processes’ (Logan, Sunstein & Press, in press). Data analysis involved two methods. First, a thematic approach was used to identify common themes which represented ‘something important about the data in relation to the research question, and some level of patterned response or meaning within [the] data set’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Initially, sections of the text, that is, the House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972 Second Reading Speech (Cwlth), the Bill, and the Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth), that mentioned the term ‘quality’, as well as concepts that had implicit connections to quality, were identified. These sections, whether sentences, phrases, or paragraphs, were read repeatedly to identify patterns related to quality. In the early phases, data analysis involved moving backwards and forwards across the data to generate a series of questions, considerations and preliminary codes. Multiple codes were clustered into common themes to represent repeated ideas. The ‘keyness’ of a theme was not reliant on quantifiable measures but determined according to its relationship to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis identified five main themes related to quality: Benefits for society, ideology, the early childhood profession, children, and the economy.

The second method involved applying a ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach (Bacchi, 2009). Central to Bacchi’s approach is the idea that policy problems are constructed through dominant discourses. The way policy problems are represented in discourses shapes particular understandings of quality in ECEC. By focusing on the underlying assumptions of how quality was represented within multiple texts, such as key government documents and transcripts of elite interviews, problem representations of quality in child care were examined. Bacchi’s approach, as taken up here, facilitates making connections between, across and within multiple texts where particular problem representations of quality in discourses can be mapped across and into policy texts.

Findings and discussion

In the following sections we argue that the Act was a path-breaking development, a critical juncture. The concept of critical junctures has been widely applied by scholars to examine turning points, often represented as crises, in institutional and policy change. Drawing loosely on the concept of critical junctures (see for example, Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Gal & Bargal, 2002; Hogan & Doyle, 2007; Scheiwe & Wilkeens, 2008), we identify three key ways in which the Act constituted a critical juncture.

The Act as a critical juncture

The Act can be considered a critical juncture in policy through the presence of three key elements. First, it was born in an intense period of political uncertainty in the lead-up to an electoral defeat; second, it was a ‘major digression’ from previous policy; and third, it had ‘lasting impact on subsequent decisions and structures’ (Gal & Bargal, 2002, p. 432) for Australian child care.

Critical junctures are characterised by ‘brief periods of momentous political, social or economic upheaval’ (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 349). In this instance, the Act was enacted during a short-lived period of rapid political, social and educational change in Australia’s history. Many factors contributed to this tumultuous period including an electoral defeat, a swing away from conservative values and the changing roles of women in society.

In addition, the Act represented a major digression from previous social policies. It established a precedent for extensive Commonwealth involvement in child care and changed the focus on child care from an individual responsibility to a community responsibility. Brennan (2002, p. 96) explains that between 1972 and 1975 (and subsequently 1989–98),

*Australia developed a world-class child care system more in keeping with the generous, public provision of social democracies such as Denmark, Sweden and France than with the virtual absence of national support exemplified by other liberal regimes such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.*

The Commonwealth’s intervention in childcare policy supported the principle that childcare services were best provided through direct government funding. This intervention reflected an understanding of child care as a societal obligation rather than a private responsibility and as such was a path-breaking policy turn. In steering this new policy path, the focus was on a national childcare system, supplanting the previous reliance on state-based policies related to welfare or education.

The Act had a lasting impact on decisions and structures for Australian child care by establishing a premise for the employment of qualified staff in child care and widespread publicly owned childcare infrastructure as a benefit for society. Brennan (2002, p. 96) highlighted the lasting impact of the Act when referring to the 1980s and 1990s that ‘Australia’s child care system is characterised by extensive coverage, high-quality care, and relatively generous subsidies’ even though the strength of this system has deteriorated in recent times. A focus on the provision of public child care set in place the principle of community-based infrastructure for almost two decades between the 1970s and 1990s, while the employment of qualified staff in child care remains an underpinning principle in contemporary times.

Next, we highlight how quality, as represented in the Act, became a key consideration for Australian ECEC policy. In doing so, we identify discursive effects of dominant discourses and point to path-dependent processes

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that have been and continue to be both enabling and constraining for the provision of quality in Australian ECEC policy.

The role of the Act in establishing quality as a key policy consideration

Government policies frame changes by shaping policy problems in particular ways (Bacchi, 2009). The Bill for the Act represented the limited number of childcare services at the time as lacking both the quantity and the quality required to support children’s development and women’s workforce participation. When introducing the Bill, Minister Lynch explained:

... the purpose of the scheme is to meet this existing problem—to help the children of working and other parents insofar as they are deprived of proper child care either because good quality facilities are not available or the cost is presently too high (p. 2289).

The problem of quality (or lack of) was to be resolved through attention to the physical environment (such as the building of new centres and the refurbishment of existing centres) and the employment of qualified staff:

Included in the concept good quality are both the physical arrangements and the professional staffing ... (p. 2288).

The Bill’s emphasis on the physical environment and professional staffing as important contributing factors to quality continues to resonate in contemporary ECEC policy. For example, the National Quality Framework (NQF), introduced as part of the Rudd and subsequently Gillard Government (2007–13) reforms, introduced nationally consistent approaches for Australian ECEC. The NQF includes a National Quality Standard (NQS) that is comprised of seven quality areas. Of these seven areas, two maintain an enduring similarity with the Act: the physical environment and staffing arrangements (DEEWR, 2012).

Discursive effects

In framing the problem of quality through the provision of physical arrangements and professional staffing, policies were shaped in particular ways through discourses. As we have previously noted, discourses are systems for producing meaning. Discourses convey language, values, practices and means for thinking about the world that shape policies through problem representations (Mclure, 2003). In turn, the way problems are represented in policy gives rise to discursive effects. Discursive effects are evident in policy when problem representations open up possibilities for some groups but close off options for others, leading to less favourable consequences for some groups or individuals (Bacchi, 2009). Consequently, discursive effects can narrow the possibilities for thinking differently about policy problems. We discuss three ways in which discursive effects of problem representations of quality are manifested in discourses of care and education: for the early childhood sector, teachers and children. We conclude our discussion by pointing to path-dependent processes evident within these discourses.

Discursive effects for the early childhood sector

Discourses of care and education are shaped by a heterogeneous array of factors, including problem representations and slippages between policy intent and enactment (Bell, 2009). The early roll-out of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth) led to a polarising effect within the early childhood sector as discourses of care and education and policy slippages worked in ways that privileged the development of some early childhood services while simultaneously constraining others.

In the years shortly after the legislation of the Act, responsibility for its implementation moved from the Department of Labour and National Services to the Education portfolio (Pincus & Shipley, 1976). While education officials had responsibility for the implementation of the Act, many officials had little knowledge of child care or the differences between preschool and childcare services (Brennan, 1999). Lack of knowledge possibly explains why funds intended to develop childcare facilities were used initially to bolster state-based preschool systems.

Former prime minister Fraser (1975–83) explained that during the first three years after the commencement of the Act, ‘75 per cent of Commonwealth expenditure on children’s services went to preschools in the States’ (Coleman, 1978, p. 15). The redirection of Commonwealth funding to support state preschool systems in the early roll-out of the Act was highlighted by Kenny, a former senior state education official. Kenny explained:

In Queensland the State Government picked it up [Commonwealth funding for child care] but on the condition that they could pump much of it into the State preschool system. It was interesting ... so Queensland became a bit of a back runner in terms of the expansion of community based child care during this period because it used much of the early flow of Commonwealth funding to bolster its State preschool system. Well ... it was a State Government initiative and it had been an election promise by the [State] Coalition Government ... this was in the Joh era as well. It was a case of, ‘Yes we’ll take Commonwealth money and yes we’ll use it the way we want to use it’ ... and preschool education is more important than child care to Queenslanders.

1 Sir Johannes ‘Joh’ Bjelke-Petersen, former controversial and conservative Premier of Queensland (1938–1987).
Directing Commonwealth funds to an existing state-based preschool system limited the development of new facilities and the provision of equipment and materials for child care. The privileging of the preschool system over the childcare system exacerbated existing divides within the early childhood sector, thus diminishing possibilities for a strong and unified sector.

**Discursive effects for teachers**

Discourses of care and education reinforced a divide for teachers within the early childhood profession by positioning some teachers as primarily providing care and others as primarily providing education. Over time, lower numbers of qualified staff in childcare centres and poorer working conditions than that of teachers working in preschool have led to low professional status for teachers employed in child care (Purcal & Fisher, 2007). While funding to support the employment of qualified staff was a welcome policy move, proportionately fewer qualified teachers were employed in childcare centres than preschools and schools at the time of the Act’s introduction (Brennan, 2005).

Emma, an interview informant with extensive involvement in policy development for Australian child care, reflected on discourses of care and education that continue to position teachers employed in child care as having lower professional status compared to their preschool and school counterparts. As Emma noted:

> ... there’s still this huge thing that well, child care is really just child care and I just get more and more despondent about the bias that exists among young kindergarten teachers ... that child care is just child care ... I mean they wouldn’t say it in so many words but that’s really what they mean and I think in all the bureaucratics [bureaucratic circles] and the government there is all the rhetoric and policies about the importance of early childhood but it is like that’s over here [gestures to the left] and over here [gestures to the right] is an often not articulated notion that well, really it is just child care.

An intent of the Act was the provision of quality through the employment of qualified teachers. Yet, discourses of care and education that work in ways to devalue the work of teachers in child care have been attributed to low professional status and ongoing staff shortages (Sumison, 2005). Challenges associated with low professional status and the retention of qualified teachers in child care remain a constraint for the provision of quality and the development of a qualified early childhood workforce in the contemporary context (DEEWR, 2013).

**Discursive effects for children**

The Act emphasised the employment of qualified teachers primarily for children older than three years of age and nurses primarily for children younger than three years of age. When introducing the Bill for the Act, Minister Lynch explained:

> Broadly speaking, these recurrent grants will be determined on the following basis. They will be based on a prescribed proportion of the salaries payable to qualified preschool teachers and nurses employed in centres—the two categories of professionally qualified staff regarded as necessary in centres providing good quality care ... Younger children under three years of age have other and more demanding needs. The basis of the recurrent grant in respect of staff is therefore different. The grant will be available for a qualified nurse employed in a centre for every ten such children or part thereof for which the centre has enrolments (p. 2290).

Discourses of care and education that group children’s needs according to their chronological age encourage thinking about children from a child development approach. Laura, a former senior academic and policy advisor, highlighted limitations for the provision of quality that focused primarily on child development with little reference to their family and community contexts. Laura pointed out:

> ... quality is very much contextually based ... and you can’t look at quality unless you actually put in the context of the family and the community ... and the early definitions of quality were only child centred. They looked at everything that was related to the development of children ... which ... was focussed on what actually happened in the child care centre.

A focus primarily on child development narrows ways in which it is possible for teachers to work with children (Cannella, 2002) and tends to overlook the fundamental role of family, culture and local contexts for children’s learning.

A distinction between the types of qualified staff available to children enabled some children to access qualified teachers but not others, namely children younger than three years. Emma highlighted how discourses of care and education constrain possibilities for the provision of quality for those children. She explained:

> ... I think that is a huge impediment to quality that you do not believe that you would provide the very best education from birth on ... that sort of belief that when it comes to under three year olds it just doesn’t matter as much [pause] keep them safe and healthy and think a bit about attachment but as far as education it’s not an issue.

Programs provided by qualified nurses were considered beneficial for children younger than three years. Yet, restricting access to qualified teachers to children over three years of age limited possibilities for thinking about specialised teaching programs for younger children. This limitation privileged children older than three years and overlooked the educational needs of children younger than three years.
The issue of limited access to qualified teachers for all children points to a legacy from the past that is played out in the present, as we elaborate below. We conceptualise this legacy as pointing to the presence of path-dependent processes where the past is not repeated in the present but is represented in related ways.

**Path-dependent processes represented in discourses**

As we have previously pointed out, discourses have constitutive power that shape policy paths in particular ways. A tendency for policy decisions to follow well-worn policy paths is influenced by previous political discourses (Scheuwe & Willekens, 2009). Path-dependent processes are evident in discourses of care and education.

To illustrate this point, we elaborate on the interconnectedness between discourses, policy slippages and path dependency. For example, limited access to qualified teachers for children younger than three years has been evident in Australian early childhood services for over a hundred years (Brennan, 1998). In the contemporary context, despite the substantial investment in ECEC by the Rudd and subsequently Gillard Labor Government (2007–2013), children younger than three years of age remain less likely than older children to access qualified teacher-led programs under the NQS (Fenech, Giugni & Bown, 2012). Furthermore, while the NQS claims to set a new ‘national benchmark’ for the quality of Australian ECEC (DEEWR, 2012), critical commentators point out the staffing arrangements ‘only modestly reflect research that clearly demonstrates the value added benefit of teacher qualifications to the provision of quality early childhood education and optimal developmental outcomes for children’ (Fenech et al., 2012, p. 7). Under the NQS, to be fully implemented in 2014, many children are likely to have only partial access to a qualified teacher during their attendance at ECEC services.

A tendency for policy actors to rely on existing institutional paths rather than create new paths in the early roll-out of the Act was highlighted by Joyce, a former senior Commonwealth bureaucrat who was active at the time of the Act’s commencement. Joyce stated:

> Because of the speed with which it was necessary to spend money from the Act it was very much easier to pour the money, which the women’s groups had hoped would be for child care, out into the existing preschool system [pause] none [emphasis] of the state governments wanted to spend money on child care ... they’d bought the idea of expanding their preschool systems.

Kerry further highlighted policy slippage between senior Commonwealth education officials’ (mis)understandings of the Act’s intent and the tendency to direct funds to existing state-based preschool systems in Queensland. Kerry stated:

> In the early to mid-70s the Commonwealth wasn’t differentiating that much between child care and preschool education or they weren’t going to stand on their digs anyway. So they were happy and the money flowed. Towards the 1980s the Commonwealth was starting to insist that more of its money go into child care but that was OK from the State Government’s point of view too because it had broken the back of its free State preschool system by then ... it had facilities in just about every school in the State. So it was happy enough to see Commonwealth funds going into child care at that stage. ... There was a little bit of a community child care sector but provision was mainly private and a reason for that was the decision to direct much of the 1970s Commonwealth funding into the State preschool system.

Considered through Bacchi’s (2009) analytical lens, the dispersal of government funds was represented as a problem requiring an expedient and rapid solution. Decisions to direct Commonwealth funds to an existing system rather than create a new one points, in part, to a tendency toward incremental change and the presence of path-dependent processes. The effect of these decisions is exemplified here by the Queensland experience because centre-based child care has remained primarily provided by the private sector in Queensland (Productivity Commission, 2009).

In this section we have highlighted how discourses of care and education, evident through problem representations and path-dependent processes, constructed understandings of quality as identified by the Act, in discursive ways. The Act was extremely important as it acknowledged that quality in child care was a key policy consideration, best supported through direct government intervention. Furthermore, the Act supported the employment of qualified staff and the development of national, public childcare infrastructure.

**Conclusion**

Improving the quality of Australian ECEC has been a high priority of the Rudd and subsequently Gillard governments (2007–13). Our analysis of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth) contributes to understandings of how discourses operate to construct quality, not as a judgement but rather as a means to consider how constructions of quality from the past may influence and contribute to understandings of quality in the present. Moreover, our analysis highlights the complexity of policy development by pointing to the presence of path-dependent processes and how a series of events coalesced to create a critical juncture in Australian ECEC policy. We suggest that pivotal points in policy development for the construction of quality in Australian ECEC policy potentially represent other key historical moments worthy of further examination.
Legislation

Child Care Act 1972 (Cth).


References


Postscript to Article Three

The purpose of this postscript is threefold. First, I briefly report on an aspect of my analysis of the *Child Care Act 1972* (Cth) that was not previously reported in Article Three, that is, the presence of community discourses. Second, I foreshadow the significance of community discourses and explain why I take up this discussion, in more detail, later in the thesis (in Part Seven, p. 173-206). Third, I discuss why I departed from my original conceptualisation of the study as a purely Foucauldian genealogy to a “looser, more inventive and more empirical” (Rose, 1999, p. 4-5) relation to Foucault’s work.

Beyond Article Three: Community discourses in the *Child Care Act 1972* (Cth).

In Article Three, I argued that the *Child Care Act 1972* (Cth) [the Act], can be considered as a path breaking development in Australian ECEC policy; in other words, a critical juncture. In this article, I further argued that the Act also established quality as a key policy consideration.

The analysis undertaken prior to writing Article Three also identified evidence of community discourses. For example, meanings of quality constructed through community discourses were associated with strengthening connections between children, families and local communities. However, I did not discuss community discourses in Article Three as it was not until after I had written Article Three and completed the analysis of all data, that the significance of these discourses became evident.

Hence, in this postscript, I focus on a previously unreported aspect of my findings from my analysis of the Act: discourses that connected the provision of high-quality services in child care with community ownership. This access was to be enabled
through a close relationship between Government and local groups. For instance, when introducing the Bill for the Act, Minister Lynch stated “the Government decided that action was urgently needed; action to ensure sufficient good quality child care facilities in the community” (House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972: Second Reading Speech, p. 2288). Minister Lynch went on to identify the role of the Government and non-profit community groups in providing child care services, explaining that the Bill “provides for assistance to non-profit organisations, including local governing bodies, to establish and operate centres which provide day care for children of working and sick parents...” (House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972: Second Reading Speech, p. 2289). The Government’s funding for child care was only available to non-profit organisations. This funding encouraged community groups to establish and operate child care centres. Minister Lynch further emphasised that “significant though the increase in physical accommodation is, of much greater importance is the provision for improving the quality of child care that will be available to the community in future years” (House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972: Second Reading Speech, p. 2295). Hence, the Bill was underpinned by a vision of child care as a service that was intrinsically connected with local communities. This connection was seen as integral to the provision of quality for children. It was envisaged the Act would “facilitate and encourage the participation and involvement of parents in the care and development of their child at the centres” (House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972: Second Reading Speech, p. 2294). The active participation and involvement of parent and community members were key expectations of the management and provision of services (Australian Government Social Welfare Commission, 1974). Thus, the solution to the problem of inadequate quality in child care was understood as a Government
responsibility that could be addressed through the development of community managed child care infrastructure between eligible organisations and Government.

Eligible organisations included local governing bodies, charitable organisations and non-profit organisations. They were required to operate on a ‘break even’ basis, instead of for profit or financial gain, in order to receive government grants. Capital grants were made available by the Commonwealth Government for “(i) the purchase, erection, extension or alteration of buildings, including necessary fixtures, and land cost, for use as a child care centre; and (ii) the purchase and installation of equipment for use in child care centres” (House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972: Second Reading Speech, p. 2290). Recurrent grants were also made available to support the employment of qualified staff. For instance, in relation to the provision of recurrent grants, Minister Lynch explained “The Government regards these grants as particularly significant because they should improve the quality of the care provided without causing the cost of the service to the parents to increase” (House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972: Second Reading Speech, p. 2290). Capital and recurrent grants vested responsibility for the provision of child care to community groups. Hence, the Government considered quality to be fundamentally connected with these grants and community responsibility. For an example of my data analysis processes, which were explained in broad terms in Article Three, refer to Appendix 11, pp. 259-273.

**Foreshadowing the significance of community discourses**

My analysis of key policy documents and transcripts from interviews with elite informants, concerning policy developments after the *Child Care Act 1972* (Cth), identified major policy shifts and new discourses, such as market and investment discourses, as discussed next in Part Five, pp. 117-148. In contrast to an emphasis on encouraging community ownership and responsibility as a means of ensuring quality for
children and families, market and investment discourses emphasised the importance of quality for the Australian economy. This emphasis caused me to reflect on the significance of Bennett’s comments, identified previously in Article One. Bennett (2004) draws attention to the remoteness of the recent past. He reminds us that “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). In keeping with Bennett’s comments and in reporting my early phases of data analysis for the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) in Article Three, I did not ‘see’ the significance of the overshadowing of community discourses and their impact on meanings of quality until toward the end of my study. I take up this discussion of the overshadowing of community discourses in more detail toward the end of my thesis, in Part Seven, p. 173-206. Additionally, my ongoing engagement with the data also caused me to question how useful a genealogical approach was to my study.

Moving away from a genealogical approach

At the time of writing Article One, I had intended to examine constructions of quality in ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009 by drawing on Foucauldian understandings of genealogy. However, as Dreyfus & Rabinow (1982, p. 106) explain, genealogy “seeks the surfaces of events, small details, minor shifts, and subtle contours.” Genealogies are interested in discontinuities rather than the complexities of what might lie behind certain events and processes. This is not to suggest that genealogies are unimportant. Rather, their deep meanings are to be “discovered in surface practices” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 107) instead of delving into the complexity of events and processes that occur at particular historical moments. However, my preliminary readings of the research literature, my engagement with the
corpus of policy documents informing the study (see Appendix 8), my preliminary mapping document (see Appendix 7) and data arising from my preliminary analysis of the interview transcripts alerted me to the significance of events and processes connected to moments of major policy change. These changes also appeared related to an accumulation of macro-contextual social, political and economic dynamics, beyond issues related to ECEC per se. These dynamics highlighted complicated events and processes that appeared to influence the direction of policy change in particular historical eras, notably the early 1970s, early 1990s and late 2000s. A purely Foucauldian genealogical approach was less conducive to focussing in-depth on those three historical eras. I became increasingly challenged as to how I could explore the timing, accumulation and sequencing of complex social, political and economic dynamics from these eras as well as shifts in discourses that constructed meanings of quality at key moments of policy change. It was this struggle that caused me to question whether a genealogical approach afforded the degree of flexibility required to take account of these dynamics. Foucault and Deleuze (1977, p. 206), in conversation about the relationship between theory and practice, explain:

from the moment a theory moves into its proper domain, it begins to encounter obstacles, walls and blockages which require its relay by another type of discourse (it is through this other discourse that it eventually passes to a different domain). Practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another. No theory can develop without encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing this wall.

In refining my analytical processes, as explained earlier in Part Two of this thesis, a looser relation to Foucault’s work enabled me to contrast the discursive effects
and constitutive power of discourses (Foucault, 1972) with Pierson’s interest in the timing, accumulation and sequencing of social, political and economic dynamics at key moments of major policy change. By drawing on a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present and Pierson’s concepts of path dependency and critical junctures (Pierson, 2004), I focussed in-depth on three historical eras [early 1970s, early 1990s and late 2000s]. In doing so, I endeavoured to make connections between discourses that work in ways to construct meanings of quality and the social, political and economic dynamics within these eras. In Part Five that follows, I elaborate on these connections.

Legislation

Child Care Act 1972 (Cth).


References


Part Five: Constructions of quality in Australian ECEC policy
Preamble to Articles Four and Five

Articles Four and Five are the second and third articles in the series of three ‘data articles’. As previously mentioned, Articles Three, Four and Five each examine data based on a brief historical era, that is, the early 1970s; the early 1990s; and late 2000s.

In Article Four, I focus on policy developments in the early 1990s that led to the creation of a mixed market for child care and the establishment of Australia’s first national child care accreditation system, the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS). This article highlights the complexities of the Australian ECEC policy landscape and the context in which quality emerged on the policy agenda for child care. It illuminates a transformative policy shift, conceptualised as a second critical juncture, and its ongoing impact on constructions of quality in child care. Further, Article Four makes a shift from the use of the term codes to refer to my preliminary analytical processes. In Articles Four, Five and Six, I use the term sub-themes to refer to these processes to be more in keeping with Foucauldian perspectives.

In Article Five, I focus on policy developments in the late 2000s that shaped the COAG reforms for Australian ECEC, leading up to and including the introduction of the National Early Childhood Development Strategy [the Strategy] (COAG, 2009). This article identifies how the reforms constructed quality differently from how quality was constructed in previous eras, particularly through discourses of investment in stronger

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3 As previously mentioned in Part Four, Article Three highlights the significance of the Child Care Act (1972) as the first critical juncture in the development of Australian ECEC policy for the period under investigation [1972-2009].
standards and qualified staff. In this article, I speculate as to whether or not the reforms will have lasting impact in ECEC and could eventually prove to constitute another critical juncture in Australian ECEC policy history.

Collectively, Articles Four and Five contribute to illuminating how multiple constructions of quality are framed by political and ideational change.

References

**Article Four** – The shaping of Australian early childhood education and care: What can we learn from a critical juncture?

The shaping of Australian early childhood education and care: What can we learn from a critical juncture?

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This article identifies and examines a critical juncture in Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy history in order to understand the contemporary Australian ECEC policy landscape, especially in relation to the way in which quality in child care is mandated and understood. In policy, critical junctures are path-breaking policy developments that have lasting impacts (Gal & Bargal, 2002; Pierson, 2004). This article illustrates how examining critical junctures can deepen understandings of processes that contribute to transformative policy shifts. In doing so, we illuminate ways in which contemporary contexts have been shaped by past policy.

Introduction

In policy, critical junctures are path-breaking policy developments that have lasting impacts (Gal & Bargal, 2002; Pierson, 2004). Examining critical junctures can deepen understandings of processes that contribute to transformative policy shifts. Such examinations illuminate the way in which contemporary contexts have been shaped by past policy. Using Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) as an example, this article examines a critical juncture in early childhood policy and the discourses that rose to prominence with this key policy shift. Our examination assists in developing rich and nuanced understandings of the Australian contemporary ECEC policy landscape.

The critical juncture under examination in this article was foreshadowed by then Prime Minister Robert (Bob) Hawke, as part of his 1990 election campaign policy speech for the Labor government:

And for the first time, we will extend fee-relief to low and middle income families using commercial child care centres.

Parents are entitled to be confident they are getting quality attention for their kids, whether they are using Government-funded or commercial centres. So we will work with all the key interests in child care to develop a system of accreditation (Hawke, 1990, p. 9).

The 1990 Hawke policy speech (hereafter referred to as the Hawke speech), signalled two significant policy shifts: the creation of a mixed market for child care; and the establishment of a national childcare quality accreditation system, the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) (1994–2011). These policy developments transformed the provision of Australian ECEC and have had ongoing ramifications for how early childhood educators and policy-makers conceive and construct quality in early childhood programs. As a result, Australia now has a predominantly for-profit childcare sector with childcare funding linked to a system of accreditation that establishes and monitors standards related to quality in early childhood programs.

The analysis reported here was undertaken as part of a larger study that examined constructions of quality in Australian ECEC between 1972 and 2009. This article focuses on the period prior to and shortly after the Hawke speech and proceeds in four parts. First, we explain our methodology which draws loosely on Pierson’s perspectives of policy history (2004, 2006) and a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present (Foucault, 1977). Second, we provide an overview of our data sources and data analysis methods. Third, we identify key elements of the 1990 Hawke speech and surrounding political events that signal a critical juncture for Australian child care. Fourth, we highlight the ongoing impact of this critical juncture, including the prominence of market discourses.
in Australian ECEC and the long-term implications for how quality is understood in a mixed childcare market. Policy histories have been used to illuminate ECEC policy trajectories in international contexts (Scheive & Willekens, 2009) but, to date, have been less widely used in Australia. It is, therefore, important to illuminate the trajectory of Australian ECEC policy, particularly in relation to matters of quality.

**Key definitions**

In endeavouring to illuminate the trajectory of Australian ECEC policy in relation to quality, we work from the premise that ‘[p]olicies are both systems of values and symbolic systems, ways of accounting for and legitimating political decisions’ (Ball, 2008, p. 13). Path-breaking policy developments signalled by a critical juncture, place institutional arrangements on paths or trajectories, which are then very difficult to alter’ (Pierson, 2004, p. 138). In a previous article (Logan, Sumnion & Press, 2013, p. 87), we drew on existing policy studies (see, for example, Capaccio & Kelemen, 2007; Gal & Bargal, 2002; Hogan & Doyle, 2007, 2009; Pierson, 2004; Scheive & Willekens, 2009) to conceptualise a critical juncture as: eventuating at a brief times of political, social or economic crises; reflecting a ‘major digression’ from previous policy; and having ‘lasting impact’ on subsequent policy choices and arrangements. We apply these three key elements as identifying features of the critical juncture under examination in this article.

**Methodology, data sources and methods**

In order to understand the ‘systems of values’ and ‘symbolic systems’ evident in contemporary Australian ECEC policy, we draw upon two methodological perspectives: policy history (Pierson, 2004, 2005) and a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present (Foucault, 1977). Both perspectives recognise the potential of historical material to shed light on contemporary contexts.

Policy history enables the exploration of broad temporal dimensions of policy processes, that is, the dynamics of policy developments over time. This exploration facilitates the tracing of macro-contextual factors and processes that can lead to major policy change, such as the ascendency of neoliberalism and micro-economic reforms during the years of the Hawke-Keating Government (1983–1996). Similarly, we highlight perspectives of early childhood professionals and advocacy groups to map conditions surrounding the formation of a critical juncture and its ongoing impact.

We also put to use our version of a history of the present to problematise contemporary practices by looking back at historical moments and exploring conditions for such practices to exist (Caste, 1994). This approach examines how discourses work in complex ways as ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault, 1972, p. 54). As such, discourses can be considered as exercising power through the construction of particular practices, meanings and language use in policy texts.

Using both approaches draws attention to discourses as ‘socially produced forms of knowledge that set limits upon what it is possible to think, write or speak about a given social object’ (Bacchi, 2009, p. 35), and processes associated with macro-contextual social, political or economic factors. Our identification of macro-contextual factors contributes to signalling a critical juncture and, in doing so, highlights the ascendency of market discourses for Australian child care. In turn, we draw attention to the effects of market discourses for constructions of quality in ECEC.

Our analysis draws on a dataset from the period immediately prior to, through to shortly after, the Hawke speech. It includes two sources of data: policy documents and interviews with policy elites. The following Commonwealth government policy documents instrumental in the development of the childcare accreditation system were selected for in-depth analysis: the *Policy Launch* by then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, 8 March 1990 (Hawke, 1990); *National Accreditation System for Child Care Services—a report prepared for the Minister for Aged, Family and Health Services* (Committee of Child Care Industry Representatives, 1990); *Accreditation of Early Childhood Services in Australia—a report prepared for the Department of Health, Housing and Community Services* (Wangmann, 1991); and the *Interim Report to the Minister for Aged, Family and Health Services* (Interim National Childcare Accreditation Council, June, 1992).

Thirteen individual semi-structured interviews with policy elites were undertaken by the first author. Details of the interviews are reported in more detail elsewhere (Logan, Sumnion & Press, 2014). In order to gain an in-depth sense of issues contained within the interviews, eight interviews were transcribed by the first author while five interviews were professionally transcribed for reasons related to time constraints. By drawing on the perspectives of policy elites, we endeavoured to capture a sphere of influence of policy production, along with the form and content of selected government policy documents (Ball, 2008). All policy elites were either directly involved as policy-makers or as policy commentators. They comprised five senior bureaucrats, four academics and four key professionals.

However, for the purposes of this article we have drawn upon the perspectives of four policy elites. Of these policy elites, three had direct involvement as policy-makers for the period of the development of the accreditation system, while one was influential as a policy commentator.

Data analysis of the policy texts involved two phases. First, extracts mentioning the term quality, and concepts implicitly connected to quality were identified. Examples...
of implicit connections included references to quality as a guarantee and a set of standards. These extracts were read repeatedly to identify patterns and sub-themes. The sub-themes were then clustered into common themes. A similar process was adopted for the analysis of the interview transcripts. This early phase of analysis generated preliminary thoughts, questions and summary interpretations. A process of mapping connections between the policy texts, interview transcripts and broader corpus of research literature enabled us to make connections between and across the data sources. In doing so, we found diverse representations of quality in the data such as ‘guarantee’, ‘aspiration’, ‘standards’ and ‘choice’.

Second, we adopted a ‘What’s the Problem Represented to be (WPR)?’ approach (Bacchi, 2009). This approach uses six interrelated questions to examine implied problems and underlying assumptions contained within policies (Bacchi, 2009). By applying these questions to the data, we examined how conditions for policy problems, elaborated in discourse, shape the concept of quality. This level of analysis considered how issues and policy problems pertaining to quality were framed. Both phases of analysis contributed to addressing the primary research question for the larger study: how has quality been constructed in government policy concerning centre-based long day care in Australia between 1972 and 2009?

At a conceptual level, the notion of critical junctures (Pierson, 2004) enabled us to draw associations between possible influences of macro-contextual factors and policy developments concerning quality in child care. We applied the three key elements that we suggest indicate a critical juncture to the data set and relevant research literature to test whether policy developments in this period could be considered a critical juncture (see, for example, Brennan 1998, 2000; Brennan & Adamson 2012; Brennan & O’Donnell, 1986). In the next section, we identify and discuss the three key elements of a critical juncture evident in the Hawke speech and the period surrounding it. We then turn our attention to professional initiatives from that period that further contribute to explanations of policy change.

The 1990 Hawke policy speech

The Hawke–Keating Government years (1983–1996) were a time of social and economic reform, particularly for women (Ryan & Bramston, 2003). The reforms were driven, in part, by concerns about the impact of a global economic recession of the 1980s and early 1990s on the Australian economy. Some key reforms included an agreement between the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Government in 1983, known as the Accord, the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and the Affirmative Action Act 1986 (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) (Cth). Collectively, these reforms supported increased numbers of women in the workforce and boosted a weakening economy. However, the reforms also emphasised a pressing need for child care as women’s labour force participation rates escalated and demand for child care continued to outstrip supply (Logan, Press & Sumison, 2012).

Political, social or economic crisis

The 1990 election was a time of political crisis for the Hawke Government. High interest rates, an economic downturn and a swing against the Government raised concerns about their ability to win a successive fourth term in office (Ryan & Bramston, 2003). As the election drew near, other concerns about a shortage of childcare places were coupled with concerns about the quality of child care (Wangmann, 1994). Although these debates appeared secondary to broader debates about the economy, heated disputes centred on the role of government in funding child care (Brennan, 2008) and perceived inequities in access to publicly funded childcare places compared to non-subsidised for-profit centres. These perceived inequities loomed large as election issues, particularly in some marginal Labor electorates.

A major digression from previous policy

The Hawke speech promised to extend Commonwealth Government funding to the private childcare sector and simultaneously announced the development of a national childcare accreditation system. Following the introduction of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth), Commonwealth policy had broadly supported the principle that child care was best provided through funding for public infrastructure (Logan et al., 2013). Private sector funding was therefore a major digression from previous childcare policy. It was, however, in keeping with the government’s emphasis on micro-economic reform. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s the Commonwealth Government relied increasingly on the ‘free’ market for what had previously been government-owned or supported services (Pusey, 2003) in conjunction with standard settings through performance measures.

Lasting impact on subsequent policy choices and arrangements

The policy directions instigated by the Hawke announcement have had lasting impacts on Australian child care in at least two key ways. First, the extension of government funding to the for-profit sector was a significant ideological shift that heralded the rapid expansion of child care as a business venture (rather than a community-based service). Private, for-profit child care became, and has remained, the predominant form of child care in Australia which now relies on mixed market childcare provision.

Second, the speech triggered the development of a compulsory national childcare accreditation system to address concerns that quality in child care would drop
if provision was primarily reliant on the private sector. This was significant for two reasons: it shifted the focus towards the quality of childcare services instead of primarily focusing on the quantity of childcare services; and it began to shape the way in which quality in programs was perceived. Accreditation, in one form or another, has existed since that time, most recently under the rubric of the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

Dramatic policy moments, such as critical junctures, often represent the final stage of processes that have gradually worn away previous policy stances (Pierson, 2005). While many junctures occur in policy-making processes, this critical juncture represented a transformative policy shift from an emphasis on government funding of service infrastructure towards reliance upon a mixed economy. However, focusing on macro-contextual factors alone can overlook processes ‘’that lend themselves to inquiries about the “moves” of particular “actors” at a moment in time’’ (Pierson 2005, p. 34). In the following section, we turn our attention to professional initiatives such as the moves of union officials, early childhood professionals, parents and advocacy groups about concerns for quality in child care. These initiatives illuminate complexities surrounding the Hawke speech and examine its ongoing impact upon constructions of quality in ECEC.

Professional initiatives

Although matters of quality emerged in earlier policy debates, particularly through the advocacy efforts of professional organisations, 1990 was the first time concerns about quality featured so prominently in an election platform (Wangmann, 1994). These concerns stemmed broadly from government reports (ABS, 1986), union officials, parents, early childhood professional groups (Press & Wong, 2013) and advocacy groups (Brennan, 1998) in the years just prior to the 1990 election. For example, in 1988, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released a report on commercial child care that reported high numbers of young, inexperienced and untrained staff in privately owned childcare centres (ABS, 1988). Publicly funded childcare centres, usually referred to as community-based centres, received government funding and functioned as non-profit enterprises. This approach was conducive to the employment of well-qualified, experienced staff, whereas privately owned centres relied primarily on parent fees to cover expenses, including staffing costs. As a result, privately owned centres appeared more inclined to employ cheaper, less qualified and inexperienced staff in order to minimise expenses and maximise profit. While not all private operators were motivated by profit, Jane, a policy elite informant in the current study, explained her first-hand experience of quality in many privately owned childcare centres she visited:

... I’d often go to a centre where, as you would probably know, the licensing requirements (in NSW) were that if you had 20 or 25 children or under you didn’t need any (Jane’s emphasis) qualified people and I would find young girls in charge of large groups of children, nobody around to help them... like lawyers running the show as a tax write-off, owning the business... (There was) a lot of problems with just meeting the bare standards around licensing (Jane, former union official).

Reports from union officials (such as Jane), government reports (ABS, 1988) and other anecdotal comments from professionals (Brennan, 1998) contributed to growing concerns about the quality of many childcare centres. As these concerns escalated, other concerns about an acute shortage and uneven distribution of publicly, funded childcare places also loomed large (Robertson & Cox, 1981). Jane described her experience of the shortage and inadequate distribution of publicly funded childcare places for many families:

... you had a predominance of services (publicly funded child care) in wealthy areas (in the late 1980s) because those people had been in a position to write the submissions and so on. Now we’d moved to a system where it was more a needs-based planning approach but that didn’t lead to the change overnight, so obviously in a lot of areas where you would have had traditional Labor constituents, the people were using private [Jane’s emphasis] day care and they had no [Jane’s emphasis] access to fee relief. So if you were in Mt Druitt [one of Sydney’s lowest socioeconomic suburbs] and you happened to be going in to the community-based centre at Mt Druitt you were getting fee relief, and if you hadn’t been able to get in there and you were going to the private one [child care centre], you were both on the same wage and you worked at the same bus company or whatever... you didn’t get any fee relief, you had to pay the full fee. So there was a huge, huge pressure politically across the trade union movement and within the Labor Party and the Labor Government, to equalise that (Jane, former union official).

Jane’s comments highlight her perception of growing unrest from union officials and parents about inequitable access to publicly funded non-profit child care and fee support. While limited Australian research is available about the benefits of non-profit provision, international research (Cleveland & Kashinsky, 2009) suggests non-profit status is associated with higher quality child care than commercial centres. Therefore, concerns about inequitable access to publicly funded non-profit child care and related concerns about quality, fuelled pressure for policy change prior to the 1990 election.

Since the early 1980s, the focus of government policy had been on the cost and supply of child care rather than
the quality of the program (Wangmann, 1994). For some years prior to the 1990 announcement, members of the early childhood profession had endeavoured to have the issue of quality in child care addressed. According to Press and Wong (2013) early childhood professional groups had been actively raising the issue of quality in long day care since the 1980s. Such endeavours included research at the Brisbane Lady Gowrie Centre (Watts & Patterson, 1985), ministerial reports (Murray, 1986) and literature reviews (Lady Gowrie Child Centre [Melbourne], 1987). Importantly, the Australian Early Childhood Association (AECA) supported trials of quality accreditation systems in the states of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. The trials, based on the American system developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), aimed to develop understandings of how accreditation could be developed for the Australian context (Wangmann, 1994). The AECA initiatives were to prove useful as models for the later development of a national system.

According to Laura, policy elite informant in the current study, the concerted advocacy efforts of the AECA and unions converged to put the quality of children’s experiences in child care on the political agenda and influence the development of the national accreditation system.

I was there as part of all of those debates [and] I can’t underestimate the role they [the ACTU] played in getting quality into political rhetoric. It sounds ridiculous that the union did it, but they did. They were fortunate that AECA had been doing a lot of work around this [promoting the idea and trialing voluntary accreditation systems] (Laura, former senior bureaucrat, academic and policy advisor).

Laura’s comments, along with recommendations from key government reports (for example, Committee of Child Care Industry Representatives, 1990), highlight the cumulative impact of professional initiatives over many years. These initiatives enabled the advocacy efforts of early childhood and union groups to be attuned to the concerns of government at a time when the Government appeared receptive to policy change. While opening funding to the private sector was a devastating blow for proponents of publicly funded child care (Brennan, 1990), combined advocacy efforts were instrumental in creating new possibilities for the provision of high quality in child care. This resonates with Sumison’s (2006) assertion that powerful results can be achieved when professionals combine efforts to focus on politics as well as policy.

Our analysis highlights how macro-contextual factors and professional initiatives contribute to possible explanations for the change in direction indicated in the Hawke speech. This change assuaged a number of political tensions for the Government. First, providing funding to private providers alleviated the shortage of funded childcare places by stimulating supply and appeased disgruntled childcare operators and parents who did not have access to government funding (Brennan & Adamson, 2012). Second, the speech announced the development of a system which would focus upon quality, regardless of service ownership. In doing so, this announcement was designed to assuage concerns about poor quality in child care. However, the policy direction created by the speech gave rise to market discourses in Australian ECEC policy, reinforcing the notion that “new policies create new politics” (Schattschneider, 1935, as cited in Pierson, 2005, p. 39). Next, we outline the effects of market discourses for constructions of quality in Australian ECEC policy.

Market discourses in child care

In this section we aim to highlight how constructions of quality in contemporary Australian ECEC policy texts are deeply embedded in market discourses that construct child care as a commodity that can be bought and sold (Brennan & Adamson, 2012; Lloyd & Penn, 2012). Opening up childcare provision to the market positioned parents as consumers in a mixed childcare market. Prime Minister Hawke’s speech, referred to earlier, frames quality as assurance for consumers of child care. In other words, consumer confidence was to be assured by developing a system (an accreditation) to set standards to measure and monitor the quality of child care. A closer look, however, identifies a number of questionable assumptions in this representation. First, framing quality only as an assurance for parents risks overshadowing an emphasis on quality for children. Second, standards alone are assumed to be sufficient to ensure quality. Third, quality is assumed to be unrelated to service ownership. Fourth, any service provider is assumed to be able to provide quality.

In the Hawke speech, the shift to a mixed childcare market was justified through concepts of choice, availability and affordability for women to increase their access to employment opportunities. For example, Prime Minister Hawke announced:

We recognise that if women are to have a real choice, they need access to child care. That is why we have established what is already one of the best systems of child care in the world, and why we will make it even better—more places and more affordable access to them (1990, p. 9).

Yet, constructing women as consumers of child care assumes that consumers (read parents) will be able to effectively choose and therefore determine the quality of child care through the choices they make. In brief, in child care the primary consumers of the service are the children. For this reason quality can be difficult to determine as young children have developing communication skills and may not easily be able to communicate the quality of the service they experience (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2009).
Moreover, when parents choose childcare services their choices are based on multiple factors, including location and cost as well as quality. Therefore, parents’ ability to discern quality is limited by their knowledge, experience of childcare centres and awareness of less easily observable aspects of quality (Shimmin, 2011; Sumison & Goodfellow, 2009). Cleveland and Krashinsky note that in mixed markets, challenges associated with discerning quality can lead some commercial firms ‘to provide superficial evidence of this costly quality but actually provide less than demanders want and quality that is lower than advertised’ (2009, p. 441). Compounding these challenges are high-switching costs associated with child care, a point also highlighted by Avril, a policy elite informant in the current study. She commented:

We’ve got this absurd idea that if we fund parents that they will be able to choose [Avril’s emphasis] the child care and therefore affect the quality, which doesn’t hold at all. We know bloody well with child care, you take what you can and most parents don’t question it ... because the other thing and I know this as a researcher ... you cannot get parents to criticise the care of the kids they’ve got at the moment. It comes up again and again in surveys; parents will always say it’s fine because if it’s not fine they’re doing a bad job as a parent (Avril, former policy advisor, researcher and current social commentator).

Avril’s comments highlight some of the complexities parents face in exerting pressure on the quality of child care in mixed markets. Even when offered higher quality or lower costs, parents’ reluctance to move their child from one service provider to another limits the capacity of market mechanisms to ensure quality (Brennan, Cass, Himmelweit & Szебehely, 2012). A further challenge for parents is that childcare markets flourish primarily in profitable environments. Therefore some parents may face limited or no choice, particularly in regional or remote areas (Harries, 2009).

Challenges surrounding how to determine and account for quality in mixed markets was also evident in policy-making developments for the establishment of the accreditation system. These challenges led to considerable disagreement among key stakeholders. For example, in 1990 a committee of commercial and non-commercial childcare representatives was established to ensure ‘a satisfactory and consistent level of quality across all sectors of the industry and across all States’ (Committee of Child Care Industry Representatives, 1990, p. 3). The committee recommended the establishment of the Interim National Accreditation Council (INAC) (1991–1993) to oversee the development of the accreditation system. The final INAC report recommended a system with two stages (Wangmann, 1995). Stage one would provide fee relief and a minimum level of quality (Wangmann, 1991) while stage two was intended as a voluntary stage to provide staff with incentives to achieve higher levels of quality and receive formal recognition of this achievement. However, towards the end of 1992 the final INAC report and a separately delivered dissenting minority report from representatives of the private childcare industry were delivered to the Minister for Aged, Family and Health Services (NCAC, 2009). The dissenting report raised concerns from many private childcare providers about the recommendations contained in the INAC report citing fears associated with increased costs, recruiting and retaining qualified staff and a lack of resources to implement accreditation procedures (Austalian Federation of Child Care Associations, 1992).

While many of these fears were well-founded, the elimination of the second stage removed a system-based incentive for the pursuit of higher quality beyond minimum standards. Emma, a policy elite informant in the current study, explained the vision for the two-staged system as:

... a kind of base level of quality that was mandated and then a kind of optional higher level of quality so that services that were already good could be supported to continue to improve with this belief that you never actually get there ... that you always need to be thinking and improving and changing and so there was great disappointment that wasn’t there [Emma, former academic and policy advisor].

Emma’s comments reinforce a conceptualisation of quality that is closely aligned with broader definitions of quality. More recently, these aspirations have been supported by research that suggests going beyond minimum quality requirements improves children’s developmental outcomes (Sylva et al., 2003). However, in an attempt to assuage differences between key stakeholders, the Commonwealth Government approved a compromise of only one stage, requiring services meet a minimum level of quality in order to be accredited and thereby receive fee relief (NCAC, 2009). Thus, system-based incentives for broadening constructions of quality were hampered by concerns associated with profit motives.

Nevertheless, the development of the original accreditation system was a major step forward for ensuring a level of quality in child care. Yet tensions associated with rationales of individual choice, the profit motive and narrowing definitions of quality are inherently embedded in mixed childcare markets. Seemingly, the motivation to increase profits by reducing costs, most notably staffing costs, can lead to incentives to employ minimum numbers of qualified staff. This motivation can be at odds with providing and sustaining high quality in child care (OECD, 2006).

Conclusion

In order to shed light on the value of policy histories for illuminating the trajectory of Australian ECEC policy, and constructions of quality in that policy landscape, we have drawn upon two methodological perspectives: policy
history (Pierson, 2004, 2005) and a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present (Foucault, 1977). These perspectives have enabled us to identify a critical juncture in childcare policy and connections between this juncture and the effects of market discourses on constructions of quality in child care.

The Hawke speech and the childcare policy directions it flagged represented a major digression from previous policy and had impacts lasting to the present day. It changed the face of Australian child care through stimulating the provision of child care by the private sector, resulting in a shift from a reliance on publicly funded non-profit child care, to a mixed market in which the private sector predominates. The Hawke speech announced the creation of a national childcare quality accreditation system, the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS), which has had a profound impact on the ways in which the quality of child care is understood and enacted.

Debates about funding the private sector and creating a mixed market for childcare provision have been and continue to be contentious issues in international ECEC policy contexts (Penn, 2012). These debates were particularly contentious in the Australian ECEC policy context throughout the late 1960s and early 1990s (Brennan, 1998). Yet in contemporary times the market approach has become the widely accepted model of delivery in Australia, with the nonprofit sector the dominant provider of long day care services (DEEWR, 2010). This acceptance remains largely unquestioned within policy circles and the community despite findings that question whether mixed markets can support and improve the quality of child care.

Our examination of a critical juncture highlights the establishment of the national childcare quality accreditation system, the QIAS, and the context in which quality emerged on the childcare policy agenda. Critiques of the implementation of the QIAS pointed to its potentially narrowing effect on the complexity of quality in child care (Grieshaber, 2002); however, attention to recent history also highlights accreditation’s role in mediating market forces and placing the issue of childcare quality on the political agenda.

Most early childhood services in Australia today are encompassed by a newer version of an accreditation scheme, centred on the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2012). The need to further improve quality has become an intrinsic element of reform for the ECEC sector as evidenced by the former Rudd Labor Government's National Early Childhood Reform Agenda (2007–2013). Quality in child care, and the early childhood sector more broadly, has become a legitimate focus of mainstream political discourse and a focal point of service delivery. This focal point has triggered valuable discussions about the complexity of quality.

Endnotes

Ethical considerations have been met by addressing the requirements for interviewing human participants as outlined by the Charles Sturt University Ethics in Human Research Committee. Approval no: 302/2011/01.

1 An exhaustive search for the interim National Childcare Accreditation Council (June, 1992) Quality, affordable, childcare, Australia-wide: Final report was undertaken, however, this document was unable to be located.

2 Now Early Childhood Australia (ECA).

Legislation


Child Care Act 1972 (Cth).

Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth).

References


A critical juncture in Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy?


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Abstract
Between 2007 and 2013, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) introduced major national policy reforms to improve quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Brennan and Adamson, 2014). By analysing policy documents underpinning the COAG reforms for early childhood, this article contends these reforms have been so far-reaching that, conceivably, they could have a lasting impact on systems and structures designed to improve quality in ECEC and fundamentally alter the trajectory of future policies. To this extent, they could eventually prove to constitute a critical juncture (Hogan and Doyle 2009; Pierson, Politics in time: history, institutions, and social analysis, 2004) in Australian ECEC policy history. In this article, we speculate about whether history will position the COAG reforms as a critical juncture in policy or see them weakened by policy moves that erode provision of quality in ECEC. We argue that studying the potentiality of critical junctures in ECEC policy illuminates the complexity of policy production and provides insights into the nature of future policies.

Keywords: Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reforms; Critical juncture; Policy change; Quality; Discourse; Qualified staff

Background
Between 2007 and 2013, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) introduced major national policy reforms to improve quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Brennan and Adamson 2014). The COAG reforms for early childhood, hereafter referred to as the reforms, promised substantial financial commitment and legislative initiatives to improve early childhood outcomes for all Australian children. Initiatives included a National Partnership agreement across Australia’s six States and two Territories for a National Quality Agenda to unify previously disparate State and Territory licensing and regulatory systems. The reforms included the following: stronger standards, streamlined approaches to regulatory requirements, a new rating system to measure quality, the first national ECEC curriculum document—the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), and strategies to develop the early childhood workforce (Council of Australian Governments 2009). In this context, the reforms aimed to improve quality by investing $77 million over four years (Rudd and Macklin 2007b). This funding and changes to standards and
structures for the early childhood sector constituted “bold and ambitious” policy developments (Tayler 2011, 223). Yet the approach to government funding remained largely the same that tied government subsidy to systems that measure and monitor quality.

The ensuing National Quality Framework (NQF) aligns Australia’s ECEC standards more closely with research evidence concerning the structural components of quality likely to improve child and family outcomes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2012). At the time of writing, however, the Productivity Commission, the Australian Government’s independent research and advisory body, has been commissioned to undertake an inquiry into the sustainability of Australia’s ECEC system. While the Government’s final report is still to be released, recommendations from the Draft Report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning (Productivity Commission 2014) indicate that future policy directions for ECEC remain uncertain. In this article, we speculate about whether history will position the COAG reforms as a critical juncture or see them weakened by policy moves that erode provision of quality in ECEC, for example, through weakening standards for ECEC services. Our speculations are informed by findings from a study, currently underway, that investigates constructions of quality in Australian ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009. We focus specifically on an analysis of policy documents and interviews with key policy actors that have underpinned the COAG reforms for early childhood.

The article proceeds in four sections. First, for readers unfamiliar with contemporary Australian ECEC policy, we briefly outline the context of the COAG reforms. Second, we explain our understandings of critical junctures as important moments in policy development that radically alter the trajectory of policy (Pierson 2004) and produce “overwhelming mandates for policy and/or structural change” (Hogan and Doyle 2009, 213). Third, we briefly outline the study that has informed our speculations, with particular reference to a component of the study that involved the analysis of the COAG reforms. Fourth, we discuss the findings of our analysis which identify that the COAG reforms play a role in constructing quality in ECEC, primarily through discourses of investment in stronger standards and qualified staff. We conclude that sustaining the provision of quality is subject to political and ideational change, particularly in relation to key components of quality such as qualified staff and sustaining a skilled early childhood workforce.


The COAG, originally established in 1992, is a peak forum comprising ministerial members from each tier of Australian government: Commonwealth, States and Territories, and Local Government (Flottman and Page 2012). Responsibility for various aspects of Australia’s ECEC system is shared between these tiers of government. For a decade or so prior to the reforms, national reports (Press and Hayes 2000; Elliott 2006; Press 2006) and international reports (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006; United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund 2008) highlighted at least three key issues for Australian ECEC: fragmented and inequitable provision of existing policies and regulatory requirements, low levels of government investment compared to international standards, and increased reliance on markets and market mechanisms for the provision of services. These reports along with a growing body of evidence (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006)
identified the importance of access to quality in ECEC for improved child outcomes and raised concerns about the effectiveness of Australia's existing ECEC systems. Together, these reports and concerns provided a compelling platform for radical ECEC policy change.

The reforms, summarised in Appendix 1, were formalised in the National Early Childhood Development Strategy (the Strategy) (Council of Australian Governments 2009). The key to the reforms was a focus on quality as a centrepiece of change to systems and structures for the early childhood sector (Cheeseman and Torr 2009; Logan et al. 2012). In the following section, we elaborate on our understandings of how transformative policy change occurs and can be conceptualised as a critical juncture.

Conceptualising critical junctures
Critical junctures proffer explanations for major institutional and policy reform (Hogan and Doyle 2007). The study of critical junctures and related concepts of path dependency are crucial to understanding temporal processes of institutional change but have received less attention in relation to policy change (Pierson 2004). Critical junctures not only contribute to understandings of how policy change is connected to past events but can also provide enriched explanations of future policy directions.

Studies drawn from macro-economic and social policy (see for example, Donnelly and Hogan 2012; Gal and Bargal 2002; Hogan and Doyle 2007, 2009) describe elements that constitute critical junctures as eventuating at times of political, social or economic crises (Capoccia and Keleman 2007; Hogan and Doyle 2007, 2009; Pierson 2004); a major digression (Gal and Bargal 2002) or “ideational and radical change” from previous policy (Hogan and Doyle 2007, 884); and having “lasting impact on subsequent decisions and structures” (Gal and Bargal 2002, 432). These studies have employed diverse approaches for examining critical junctures.

More recently, Hogan and Doyle (2009) developed a comparative framework for the study of critical junctures. They argue that ideational change is a crucial element that differentiates a critical juncture from less transformative policy change. In doing so, they contend that contextually specific factors, such as the influence of policy actors, play a role in bringing about ideational change.

If a critical juncture is indicated by lasting impact, at what point can the longevity of impact be determined? According to Donnelly and Hogan (2012), this lasting impact might be determined as a period beyond at least one change of government. Therefore, by providing a more contemporaneous timeframe, the transformational impact of policy change can be assessed within a defined period (Donnelly and Hogan 2012).

In our earlier writing, we conceptualised a critical juncture as requiring the presence of at least three key elements: political upheaval, a major digression from previous policy and lasting impact (Logan et al. 2013). However, in this article, we remould our previous conceptualisation to include a focus on ideational change (Hogan and Doyle 2009) and re-define our understanding of lasting impact to endure beyond at least one change of government (Donnelly and Hogan 2012). Similarly to Hogan and Doyle (2009), we suggest that when contextually specific factors of social, economic or political crisis, radical change and lasting impact are characterised by ideational change, they can
signal a paradigm shift (Hall 1993), thereby constituting a critical juncture. In the following section, we elaborate on our methodology that draws on our current conceptualisation of critical junctures and combines this conceptualisation with an analysis of discourses that construct meanings within policy texts underpinning the COAG reforms. Partly, as a consequence of these discourses, new systems and structures construct quality in ECEC in complex ways.

Methods
Methodology guiding the analysis
To better understand the complexities of policy change, we turn our attention to discourses contained within policy texts. In doing so, we draw on Foucauldian perspectives of discourse (1972, 2000). Foucault (1972, 90) explains that discourse is “the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements”. Moreover, Ball explains (2008, 5) “Discourses mobilise truth claims and constitute rather than simply reflect social reality.” By privileging certain information and ways of thinking, discourses transmit values, beliefs and ideologies through policy texts and influences from policy actors. Thus, the constitutive power of discourse is exercised in policy texts and interpretations of policy. By analysing changing discourses of policy texts over time, we can identify ideational change in policy constructs.

The data set
This article is drawn from a larger study investigating constructions of quality in Australian ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009. While the study has generated a large corpus of data, the data set utilised for the analysis reported here consists primarily of four policy documents underpinning the COAG reforms: New Directions for Early Childhood Education (Rudd and Macklin 2007a); Labor’s Plan for High Quality Child Care (Rudd and Macklin 2007b); Towards a National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009) and Investing in the Early Years: A National Early Childhood Development Strategy (Council of Australian Governments 2009) (for more detail, see Table 1). As key expressions of government policy and documents commissioned to inform government, collectively, these documents contribute to “the general domain of all statements” that express “regulated practice” (Foucault 1972, 90) and “truth claims” (Ball 2008, 5) for policy at the time of the COAG reforms.

The data set used in the analysis also includes excerpts from transcripts of individual interviews with three policy actors, referred to here as policy elites because of their high professional profiles and strategic positions within ECEC policy-making circles. These policy elites, referred to throughout by the use of pseudonyms, made reference to the COAG reforms in interviews undertaken for the study. Brief professional profiles of the elite policy informants are included in Table 1.

Analytic processes
In the first stage of the analysis reported here, the data set was refined to 236 excerpts from the four policy documents and 38 excerpts from the interview transcripts that
Table 1 Policy documents analysed in this article and brief descriptions of policy elite informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Set</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. New Directions for Early Childhood Education (Rudd and Macklin 2007b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transcripts from interviews with policy elites</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Avril</td>
<td>In-depth individual interview transcript</td>
<td>A former senior policy advisor, academic and current social commentator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Barbara</td>
<td>In-depth individual interview transcript</td>
<td>A former academic and Chief Executive Officer of a large ECEC organisation and current policy advisor involved in policy-making circles during the development of the COAG reforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sarah</td>
<td>In-depth individual interview transcript</td>
<td>A former senior bureaucrat and policy advisor active in policy-making circles during the development of the COAG reforms.</td>
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referred to the term quality either implicitly or directly. Implicit references to the term quality included excerpts that referred to the importance of qualified staff for positive child outcomes while not necessarily referring specifically to the term quality. For example, “Recognised and up-to-date qualifications based on evidence will strengthen the care that is given to our children” (Rudd and Macklin 2007b, 7). Direct references to the term quality occurred 495 times in the four policy documents analysed. For example, “Quality in child care is in large part determined by the interaction between child care staff and the children in their care” (Rudd and Macklin 2007b, 6). After identifying the excerpts, we drew first on a thematic approach to data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) as a preliminary means of managing the data. This approach involved repeated readings of the excerpts to identify patterns in references to quality (Logan et al. 2013). Identified patterns were assigned sub-themes. Multiple sub-themes were then clustered into common themes (for more detail, see Logan et al. 2013). The ‘keyness’ of a theme was not reliant on its frequency or quantifiable measures for the term quality but identified according to its relationship to the research question (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Second, we applied Bacchi’s (2009) ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ approach to policy analysis. This approach uses six sequential questions, (see Appendix 2) to
analyse how dominant discourses shape problems contained within policies. Adopting this discursive approach made it possible for us to identify how quality was shaped by particular discourses within the reforms.

In addition, drawing loosely on Hogan and Doyle’s framework (2009), we identified macro-contextual factors influencing policy change in the Australian context. Macro-contextual factors such as references to social, economic or political dynamics were drawn from the data set and the research literature (see for example, Brennan and Adamson 2012; Elliott 2006; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006; Press 2006; Press and Hayes 2000). These factors included, but were not limited to, a change of national Government, a global financial crisis (GFC) and the financial collapse Australia’s largest child care corporation, ABC Learning (Sumption 2012). Drawing on these factors enabled us to conceptualise elements of a critical juncture and consider the extent to which these elements are present in the COAG reforms.

*Will the COAG reforms prove to be a critical juncture in Australian ECEC policy?*

In order to address this question, we draw upon our extended conceptualisation of a critical juncture by identifying elements that coalesce at important historical moments. These elements refer to major policy change that occurs at politically unsettled times or crises, signals ideational and radical change (Hogan and Doyle 2009) and has lasting impact beyond one change of government (Donnelly and Hogan 2012). The presence of these elements may lead to fundamental policy change for systems and structures and potentially signal a critical juncture in Australian ECEC policy.

*Politically unsettled times*

Political instability may be connected to numerous events, such as electoral landslides or other conditions associated with social or economic upheavals (Hogan and Doyle 2009). The COAG reforms were introduced at a time of political and economic instability. In November 2007, the progressive Rudd Labor Government [2007–2010; 2013] defeated the conservative Howard Coalition Government [1996–2007] after 11 years in office. The Rudd Government victory was described as an historic electoral win that signified one of the biggest swings toward labour in 40 years (McKew 2013). However, within its first year in office, in September 2008, the GFC foreshadowed looming economic instability for Australia and impacted negatively on international economies.

Shortly after the onset of the GFC in November 2008, Australia’s largest corporate child care provider, ABC Learning, experienced a financial collapse (Brennan and Adamson 2012). The collapse of ABC Learning created uncertainties about child care arrangements and the ability to undertake paid employment for many families as the company provided child care for over 100,000 children and employed approximately 16,000 staff (Sumption 2012). In an unprecedented move, the Australian Government spent $22 million to ‘bail out’ the company until the end of December 2008 (Dunkerley and Draper 2008) prior to the eventual sale of over 650 ABC Learning Centres (Brennan and Adamson 2012). These events contributed to unsettled political and economic times.
Ideational and radical policy change

The incoming Rudd Government promised ideational and radical policy change for the early childhood sector, underpinned by principles akin to social democracy (Rudd 2006). The rationale for this change was that improving quality in ECEC across all Australian jurisdictions would lead to positive and more equitable outcomes for children. Accordingly, the change of government and promises contained within the reforms also signified a new era by establishing intergovernmental agreement for nationally consistent policy measures aimed at unifying existing multi-layered administrative and regulatory arrangements (Cheeseman and Torr 2009). These government measures focused on balancing principles of the free market with increased levels of social responsibility.

Lasting impact?

The reforms were well received as a step forward for the early childhood sector (Cheeseman and Torr 2009; Taylor 2011). Yet policy developments that bring about ideational and radical change also rely on political commitment to sustain their lasting impact. Plootman and Page (2012), for example, identified how complex events and the presence of ‘political will’ in the years prior to the reforms led to the success of the Victorian State Government in providing leadership, under the auspice of the COAG reforms. In doing so, they highlight the importance of political will as a useful concept for understanding influences that bring about policy change. Their explanation is akin to Hogan and Doyle’s (2009) explanation of the role of policy actors and political entrepreneurs, such as policy elites and elected politicians, as agents in bringing about ideational change. Therefore, Australia-wide improvements to quality in ECEC rely partly on political will to sustain the lasting impacts of the reforms.

Ball (1994) explains that policy is not only what is enacted but also what is intended. At the time of writing, the COAG reforms are partway through one change of government with the Abbott-led Coalition (Conservative) Government elected in September 7, 2013. Uncertainties associated with whether this Government will reinforce and strengthen the intended reforms or erode them by incremental policy change loom large. Preliminary statements in the Productivity Commission Issues Paper (Productivity Commission 2013, iii) indicate that the “Australian Government is committed to establishing a sustainable future for a more flexible, affordable and accessible child care and early childhood learning market.” Subsequent, recommendations from the Productivity Commission’s Draft Report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning (Productivity Commission 2014) indicate a weakening of qualification requirements for educators working with children between birth and three years of age. If market-driven considerations of flexibility, affordability and accessibility overshadow considerations of quality, such as improving proportions of degree and diploma qualified staff for all children and ongoing support for teacher-child interactions, it is possible that quality in ECEC will be diminished. In turn, weakening provision of quality, particularly associated with pedagogical practices and educational programs, is likely to have deleterious effects on children as high-quality teacher-child instructional interactions are associated with children’s positive academic and social outcomes (Mashburn et al. 2008). Moreover, these market-driven considerations would also undermine attempts to build the capacity of the early childhood workforce, thereby eroding the lasting impact of the reforms.
In the following section, to deepen our understandings of ideational change underpinning the reforms and to assist in gauging the likelihood of the reforms having lasting impact, we examine how quality has been shaped by particular discourses. Whether or not the reforms will have lasting impact for how quality is constructed in future policy documents raises implications for the employment of qualified staff and increasing the proportion of degree and diploma-qualified staff in the early childhood workforce.

**Results and discussion**

**Constructions of quality in the COAG reforms**

As previously mentioned, the reforms focus on quality as a centrepiece of change to systems and structures for the early childhood sector (Cheeseman and Torr 2009; Logan et al. 2012). In the context of the reforms, the term quality is generally assumed to mean structures and practices that improve outcomes for children. For example, the reforms include a focus on “universal access” to quality in ECEC in the year before school, a “national quality agenda” and initiatives to improve the “quality and supply of the early childhood education and care workforce” (Council of Australian Governments 2009, 5). References to quality as a conduit for positive child outcomes give some prominence to children in government policy, rather than primarily focussing on workforce participation. While multiple discourses exist within policy documents underpinning the reforms, our analysis identified quality in ECEC as primarily constructed through discourses of investment in stronger standards and qualified staff.

**Discourses of investment in stronger standards**

Discourses of investment in stronger standards reflected recognition by policymakers that inconsistent standards and a patchwork of ECEC service provision can lead to uneven access to quality in ECEC for children. For example, the Strategy stated:

> Quality standards vary across jurisdictions, sectors and service types. Existing arrangements for setting, assessing and monitoring quality in the early childhood sectors are fragmented and complex (Council of Australian Governments 2009, 18).

Uneven access to high-quality service provision was a concern as high-quality ECEC supports children's well-being and learning whereas poor quality does not (Camilli et al. 2010; Mashburn et al. 2008; Sylva et al. 2004). Similar concerns were also identified in commissioned reports to advise government policy. For instance, the Report of the Expert Advisory Panel on Quality Early Childhood Education and Care explained:

> The lack of consistency is a cause for concern because evidence about the influence and impact of qualifications, group size and staff-child ratios indicate that the existing benchmarks in the various jurisdictions are unlikely to deliver the best possible outcomes for children (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009, 7).

By highlighting inconsistent standards and service provision, the reforms emphasised the need to redress inequities in ECEC. This was a well-intended policy move. Yet, an
emphasis on stronger standards accentuates only one aspect of quality (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006). The provision of high-quality ECEC also requires attention to the continuing professional and career development of staff, team building and service responsiveness to local contexts. It could be argued that for the reforms to prove a critical juncture, there would need to be tangible and sustained commitment to balancing systems that measure and monitor quality with systems that strengthen and resource quality. The importance of establishing this balance was reinforced by Sarah, a former senior bureaucrat and policy advisor active in policy-making circles during the development of the COAG reforms. Sarah explained:

I actually met with [Minister’s name removed] a few weeks ago about the new system [the development of the NQF and National Quality Standards (NQS)] and he asked me what I thought was happening and what people were doing and one of the worries I’ve got is that we are too interested in weighing the cow, we are not interested in fattening it up and just weighing the cow won’t fatten it... I said to him, we are spending way too many resources on weighing and measuring, and not enough resources on development... (Sarah, former senior bureaucrat and ECEC policy advisor)

Sarah’s comments highlight her concerns about emphasising a need for stronger standards while overlooking other systems to develop quality in ECEC. Difficulties arise, however, when government approaches to funding are tied to standards and regulations that measure and monitor quality and not to the cost of tangible investments in quality, such as the employment and ongoing professional and career development of well-qualified staff (Brennan and Adamson 2014). Therefore, absorbing the costs of tangible investments in quality is challenging for ECEC services especially in the absence of ongoing funding mechanisms to support these costs. The importance of ongoing funding mechanisms that provide incentives to employ and retain more highly qualified staff was also evident in comments from Avril, a former policy advisor, academic and current social commentator. Avril reflected on policy changes that had removed funding mechanisms to support the employment of highly qualified staff in decades past and led primarily to a reliance on regulations and systems that measure and monitor quality. She explained:

... there was a contract [over two decades ago] between the government and the centre to provide the service ... which means [the Commonwealth Government] saw itself as [having] that relationship [with the service] and then [politician’s name removed] got rid of it ... but it means there is now no relationship apart from a regulatory one between government and services. (Avril, former policy advisor, academic and current social commentator)

From this perspective, ongoing tangible investments to strengthen and resource provision of quality require re-establishing funding mechanisms between government and early childhood services that go beyond monitoring standards and regulations. This
connection would contribute to sustaining the lasting impacts of the reforms in ECEC policy.

**Discourses of investment in qualified staff**

Discourses of investment in qualified staff emphasise the employment of increased numbers of qualified staff and the need to increase the proportion of highly qualified staff, such as degree qualified staff, in the early childhood workforce. While there is still some conflicting evidence about the contributions degree qualified staff make to provision of quality, see for example debates sparked by Early et al. (2007), internationally, there is considerable consensus that provision of quality is complex and highly qualified staff tend to contribute to high-quality ECEC provision (Goelman et al. 2006; Harrison et al. 2009; Sylva et al. 2004). Yet, with some notable exceptions (Wangmann 1991, 1995), historically, in Australian ECEC policy, an emphasis on women’s workforce participation and the expansion of child care places has taken precedence over the provision of highly qualified staff (Logan et al. 2012).

Encouragingly, policy documents associated with the reforms explicitly signalled a need for a more highly qualified workforce in order to improve quality. One of the ways they did so was by drawing attention to the contributions of degree-qualified early childhood educators to positive child outcomes. The following example is drawn from New Directions for Early Childhood Education, which states that:

... when a child participates in an early learning program under the supervision of a degree-qualified early childhood educator, the long term economic benefits of early childhood education are even greater (Rudd and Macklin 2007a, 9).

Furthermore, the Strategy explains, high staff qualifications are a crucial feature of quality as:

Key aspects of quality linked to positive child outcomes include higher qualifications of the early childhood professionals, lower child-to-staff ratios and a strong relationship between the child and a stable caregiver (Council of Australian Governments 2009, 35).

The attention to highly qualified staff, as identified by these examples, suggests that Australian ECEC policy was becoming more closely aligned with research about the determinants of high-quality ECEC (Brennan and Adamson 2014). Highly qualified staff, such as degree-qualified educators, tend to promote quality through their specialist knowledge of early childhood education and professional practices (Sylva et al. 2004) and create workplace cultures that support high-quality programs through the ongoing development of pedagogical practices and support for the professional learning of all staff (Ryan and Whitebook 2012).

Conversely, the reforms signalled the need for a more highly qualified workforce by accentuating concerns over the high proportion of unqualified and certificate qualified staff as high numbers of staff with low-level qualifications tend to be associated with
poor child outcomes (Sylva et al. 2004). For example, Labor’s Plan for High Quality Child Care noted:

one-third of the child care workforce does not hold any qualifications in children’s services. Of those who do have children’s services related qualifications, the national survey found that a diploma or advanced diploma was the most common, held by 31% of the workforce, followed by 19% of staff with a Certificate III or IV and 10% with bachelor’s degree (Rudd and Macklin 2007b, 7).

High proportions of unqualified and certificate qualified staff signalled low levels of investment in the early childhood workforce. The reforms involved a planned investment of $73.5 million over four years to raise qualifications of child care workers, including targets of one early childhood teacher for six hours per day at long day care (LDC) and preschool services operating 50 hours or more per week and licensed for 25 or more children (Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority 2014). Despite the welcomed investment, this target fell considerably short of the contemporaneous target established by the New Zealand Government: that all teacher-led centre-based ECEC services ensure 50% of their required staff hold an early childhood teaching qualification (Ministry of Education n.d.). This comparison raises questions about arguments framed around affordability (see for example, the Productivity Commission Report 2013) given that Australia has a considerably higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capita than New Zealand (World Bank 2014) and therefore arguably better able to afford to invest in a highly qualified early childhood workforce. The sustainability of the reforms seems tenuous because of at least three challenges.

**Challenges to sustaining the impact of the reforms** First, maintaining a higher proportion of degree-qualified educators than was previously mandated under most state/territory regulations creates tensions for employers/early childhood service providers as more highly qualified staff means higher salary expenses. Tensions surrounding issues of profitability and affordability are exacerbated in the Australian context as a high proportion of services operate as for-profit businesses (Sumison 2012). If staff salaries are higher than employers can afford or are willing to pay, then high-quality programs may be difficult for employers/early childhood services to attain.

Second, in the context of the reforms, degree-qualified educators have increased leadership responsibilities, such as implementing the first national curriculum for ECEC, the EYLF. Degree-qualified educators often act as mentors to staff who are attaining or upgrading qualifications and encountering new reporting and curriculum requirements. Findings from the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) project showed that staff with low-level qualifications improve their pedagogical practices when they work with qualified teachers (Sylva et al. 2003). Yet, these improvements may not be forthcoming if qualified teachers are not adequately supported in their mentoring of staff with low-level qualifications.

Third, requirements for a large proportion of unqualified or certificate qualified staff to attain higher qualifications raise expectations for these staff to increase their knowledge of discipline-based content and pedagogical practices (Grieshaber 2010). The
importance of improved knowledge of pedagogical practices, such as intentional teaching and sustained shared thinking, was also emphasised by Barbara, a former Chief Executive Officer, academic and policy advisor. Barbara explained:

... concepts like intentional teaching [and] sustained [shared] thinking are really important for our profession that move it beyond ... well... we'll put out a few toys and be nice to the children and that's good enough... if you want a centre to work well your commitment to professional development and all those things is critical (Barbara, former Chief Executive Officer, academic and policy advisor).

Barbara's comments highlight that higher staff qualifications and dedication to ongoing professional development is necessary to support the implementation of high-quality programs. Therefore, high proportions of staff gaining or upgrading qualifications require access to ongoing professional development if they are to enact new understandings of pedagogical practices in their work environments (Gribschaber 2010). The recently established Long Day Care Professional Development Programme (LDCPDP) supports early childhood educators in (LDC) services to meet qualification requirements in the NQF, but is a one-off injection of funds. Moreover, the program is available only to educators employed in LDC and not to educators employed in other kinds of early childhood services, such as preschools. If support for quality through the ongoing professional development and practices of more highly qualified staff is inadequate, then sustaining quality may be eroded.

Moreover, if the challenges raised in this section are not adequately addressed, the lasting impact of the reform's promises of improving quality in ECEC may dissipate and the potential for the reforms to constitute a critical juncture in ECEC policy may be lost. In the concluding section, we return to our speculations posed at the beginning of this article, concerning whether or not the reforms will prove to constitute a critical juncture in ECEC policy, particularly in relation to recent policy developments.

Conclusions
This article draws attention to a transformative shift that potentially constitutes a critical juncture in Australian ECEC policy. Yet our speculations, as to whether or not the reforms will constitute a critical juncture in ECEC policy are necessarily unresolved. Some intended that policy reforms have not yet been fully implemented, such as the complete implementation of the NQF, and while the Productivity Commission (2014) inquiry has concluded, the final report from the Government is not yet released. Hence, a key element in determining a critical juncture—lasting impact—is still open to conjecture.

Many of the Productivity Commission's draft recommendations emphasise the need for more flexible, affordable, accessible child care with the cost of improved standards being positioned as counter to these aims (Productivity Commission 2014). The Productivity Commission recommendations erode the policy emphases on quality by watering down reform requirements for stronger standards and highly qualified staff. However, overwhelming opposition by early childhood advocates and key stakeholders to the watering down of standards and staff qualifications, particularly in relation to qualification requirements for educators of children from birth
to three years (Early Childhood Australia 2014) may deter government from acting on those recommendations, especially in the face of robust research evidence that quality is 'key' to a strong Australian ECEC system (for example, Brennan and Adamson 2014). Ultimately, sustaining the reforms and maintaining a quality agenda despite the Productivity Commission’s recommendations will require political will and ongoing mobilisation by early childhood advocates, activists and professional organisations. A concerted effort to retain an emphasis on positive outcomes for children, however, may help to sustain ideational change and realise the potential for the reforms to have a lasting impact.

In conclusion, our speculations raise important matters about policy change for quality in ECEC. We contend that there is a need to draw attention to the complex contexts of policy production, illuminated by speculative studies of critical junctures, to ensure that provision of high quality in ECEC policy is sustainable and not subject to erosion through successive changes of government.

Endnote

Long day care (LDC) refers to centre-based child care services which usually cater for children from birth to school age. These services are open for a minimum of 8 h per day, 5 days per week and operate for a minimum of 48 weeks per year (Press and Hayes 2000).


National reform initiatives that seek to improve early childhood outcomes include:

- a National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education to achieve universal access to quality early childhood education for all children in the year before school by 2013
- a National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development to establish 35 new Children and Family Centres and to increase access to antenatal care, teenage sexual health and child and family health services for Indigenous children and families
- a six-year National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health with a focus on strategies to prevent chronic diseases that commence in early childhood
- a national quality agenda for early childhood education and care which includes stronger standards, streamlined regulatory approaches, a rating system and an Early Years Learning Framework
- national workforce initiatives to improve the quality and supply of the early childhood education and care workforce
- The Closing the Gap initiative which includes ambitious targets for Indigenous children related to infant mortality, literacy and numeracy and participation in quality early childhood education
- a National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children
- the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians
- a National Family Support Program which brings together eight Commonwealth programs for children, families and parenting
- paid parental leave arrangements
- a National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children
- development of an Early Intervention and Prevention Framework under the National Disability Agreement
- a National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, with a focus on intervening early for children and their families at risk of homelessness.
Appendix 2: What's the problem represented to be? An approach to policy analysis

1. What's the problem (e.g. the problem of uneven quality in ECEC) represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced? (Racchi 2009, 2).

Competing interests
The authors declare they have no competing interests - financial or non-financial.

Authors' contributions
HL was responsible for data collection, analysis and interpretation of the data and drafting the manuscript. Furthermore, HL has been involved in revising the manuscript critically and adding important intellectual content, particularly in relation to the conceptualisation of a critical juncture. JS and FP made contributions by revising the manuscript critically for structure, flow of the argument, and the development of the argument. All three authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in regards to questions of accuracy and integrity for any part of the work. These aspects have been appropriately investigated and resolved. Moreover, each author has participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Authors' information
HL is a Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at Charles Sturt University. He is involved in the final stages of the project. His doctoral studies focus on investigating quality in Australian early childhood education and care policy. Furthermore, HL has been involved in revising the manuscript critically and adding important intellectual content, particularly in relation to the conceptualisation of a critical juncture. JS is the Professor of Early Childhood Education at Charles Sturt University and Director of the Research Institute of Professional Practice, Learning and Education (RIPPLE). He has longstanding research interests in early childhood education and care policy, leadership in early childhood education and care. JS is the Foundation Professor of Early Childhood at Charles Sturt University and Director of the Research Institute of Professional Practice, Learning and Education (RIPPLE). He is an Associate Professor in Education at Charles Sturt University. The RIPPLE Es have a significant impact on Australian early childhood education and care policy, including on the conceptualisation of early childhood education and care. He is currently involved in research on quality in early childhood programmes, infant’s lives in child care, and integrated early childhood services.

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References


Canberra: Australian Labor Party.


Part Six: Additional analysis from the elite interviews
In Part Six, I report on additional analysis of the transcripts of the individual interviews with each of the 13 elite informants who participated in the study. As in the analyses reported in Articles Three, Four and Five, I examine the informants’ constructions of the meanings that they attributed to quality. Articles Three, Four and Five respectively focused on three historical eras: the early 1970s, the early 1990s and the late 2000s. These times of significant policy change were accompanied by the development and release of key policy documents. Because of the interrelationship between these policy changes and policy documents, analyses reported in Articles Three, Four and Five tended to focus upon those key policy documents and only on data from the interview transcripts that related directly to the policy changes in these eras.

In contrast, Part Six reports on analyses of data from the interview transcripts that referred to time periods that either fell outside the three historical eras identified in Articles Three, Four and Five, or were less directly related to the policy changes in these eras. I was particularly interested to examine this data for additional insight into the elite informants’ constructions of quality. I wondered if their constructions of quality were in some way connected to the roles and positions they held and discourses operating in policy making contexts.

Part Six has four sections. First, I briefly reiterate my use of discourse from Foucauldian perspectives as indicated earlier in the Introduction to the thesis and also in Part Two. Second, I discuss my adaptation of Bradley’s (2011) categories of policy makers to categorise the elite informants according to their roles and positions within organisations. Third, I outline data from the interview transcripts that focused on the elite informants’ meanings of quality and explain the methods adopted in my approach to data analysis. Fourth, I discuss meanings the elite informants attributed to quality and
the extent to which their roles and positions, as I categorised them, appeared to influence their meanings.

**Discourse and power**

As previously indicated in my Explanation of key terms (see pp. xxi-xxiv), Foucault (1972, p. 54) explains that discourses work in complex ways as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.” Discourses are neither fixed nor stable. Foucault (1978, pp. 101-102) further explains that discourses are “tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy.” Discourses operate in and through people, practices and institutions. They are closely connected to the ways power and knowledge operate to utilise ‘truth claims’ about what can and can’t be spoken and written about (Mills, 2003). In relation to the term discourse, Ball (1990, pp. 17-18) explains:

Thus, the possibilities for meaning, for definition, are pre-empted through the social and institutional position from which a discourse comes. Words and propositions will change their meaning according to their use and the positions held by those who use them.

I wondered if what could be known and spoken about quality in child care varied across the categories to which I assigned the elite informants in my study. Understanding how the category, to which the elite informant belonged, potentially influenced the meanings they attributed to quality is particularly relevant to the study.

*Categorising Elite Informants*
Foucault (1978) explains that categories work in ways to organise behaviours. For instance, he explains the creation of the category of homosexual in the nineteenth century was a means to label and govern same-sex behaviours (Foucault, 1978). In my study people categories (Bacchi, 2009), such as the category of elite informants, create particular groups of people concerned with developing policy to solve problems, for instance the problem of quality in ECEC.

Previously, in Article Two, I described the elite informants who participated in my study as constituting two categories of informants: first, well known public figures; second, influential but lower profile figures who are well-known through early childhood professional networks (Logan, Sumson & Press, 2014). These categories, while initially useful, were less nuanced than the categories used by Bradley (2011) in her study of Irish ECEC policy making. Bradley (2011) identified three categories of key policy makers as either Core, Specialist or Peripheral insiders. I was interested in exploring if Bradley’s categorisations would assist me to explore if the elite informants’ roles and positions had influenced meanings they attributed to quality. Her categories proved useful in refining my two previously identified categories of elite informants. However, unlike Bradley’s categorisations, the elite informants in my study referred to their policy making experiences between a specific period of investigation, [1972 – 2009]. During this period they held a variety of roles. Because of these differences, I categorised the elite informants in my study according to the roles that reflected the majority of their experiences of policy making. A brief description of my adaptation of Bradley’s categories follows:

*Core insiders* - comprise former senior policy advisors and/or bureaucrats. They have first-hand experience developing policy documents as expressions of Commonwealth government policy for child care.
Specialist insiders - comprise former and current bureaucrats and/or academics or former Chairs and leaders of large non-profit government funded organisations. They have first-hand experience in developing reports commissioned by the Commonwealth Government to influence policy for child care.

Peripheral insiders – comprise members of peak early childhood organisations and/or union organisations with an interest in advocacy issues for ECEC. They have first-hand experience in developing documents representing the views of their organisations to influence Commonwealth Government policy for child care.

The following figure categorises the elite informants reported in my study as either Core insiders (n=2), Specialist insiders (n=7) or Peripheral insiders (n=4).

**Figure 1: Categories of elite informants**

![Figure 1: Categories of elite informants](image)

Data source and analyses

The analysis reported here draws on the interview component of the study. As previously mentioned in Part Two, this component comprised the transcripts of individual in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with each of the 13 elite
informants who participated in the study. Each interview explored meanings the elite informants attributed to quality based on their particular roles in ECEC policy making contexts.

The data analysis reported here consisted of two phases. First, I utilised a thematic approach to data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was used to manage the data and map connections between, across and within the interview transcripts. An advantage of this approach was its flexibility, and its compatibility with other theoretical framings, such as my use of a Foucauldian-influenced history of the present (Foucault, 1977) and Pierson’s perspectives of policy history (Pierson, 2004). Second, I utilised Bacchi’s (2009, p. 1) ‘what’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach to policy analysis. This approach was used as a tool to critically analyse how meanings of quality were constructed in ECEC policy. It draws on a form of discourse analysis that reflects on the effects of specific problematisations contained within policy. As previously mentioned on p. xxiv of this thesis, Ball (1994, p. 10) explains that “policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended.” Similar to Ball (1994), my use of the term policy is expansive. It encompasses my use of the interviews to understand the enactment and intent of policy through the elite informants’ experiences of key considerations driving policy agendas (Ball, 1994).

In this first phase of data analysis for Part Six, I revisited the transcripts of the 13 individual interviews that had previously been coded according to concepts, key words and debates about quality, as explained in Part Two of this thesis. I looked for segments of text that indicated how the informants themselves had constructed quality. Initially, segments of text were selected as data items in response to Interview Question 7. This question asked, “the term ‘quality’ is widely used and means different things to
different people, so, I’m wondering if you can tell me what quality means to you?”.

Then, I re-read all the interview transcripts and looked again for meanings the informants attributed to quality, as identified in the preliminary coding of interview transcripts, previously reported in Part Two. These segments of text were also added to the data items identified for the additional analysis reported here. Next, I coded data items into sub-themes utilising Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach to thematic analysis. An example of the process of coding data items into sub-themes can be found in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Data items with codes applied**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data items</th>
<th>Coding concepts/ key words/ debates about quality as sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I mean by that is that you get a child that comes out of that who’s got a combination of curiosity and capacity...to be a good social being</td>
<td>1. Developing social capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. the centre belongs to a community and it is part of a network of community services.</td>
<td>2. Connectedness to communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then, I re-read my sub-themes to identify repeated patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase of the analysis involved grouping multiple sub-themes according to commonalities. For instance, sub-themes that encompassed meanings of quality related to early childhood staff were grouped together. The sub-themes formed three distinct groups, as indicated in the second column of Table 2 below. Next, I reviewed these groups of sub-themes in order to define and refine them further (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved looking for coherent patterns or contradictions about quality in order to identify overall themes. The identification and naming of overall themes
captured “the essence of what each theme is about” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

Three overall themes were identified. These overall themes, subsequently referred to as themes, identified meanings of quality as: ‘professional’, ‘contextual’ and ‘technical’.

Professional meanings emphasised the knowledge, skills and professional practices qualified early childhood staff bring to ECEC services. Contextual meanings emphasised connections with children, families and their local communities. Technical meanings emphasised processes of continuous improvement, based on prescribed and measurable indicators of quality. The categories of elite informants, as either Core, Specialist or Peripheral insiders, were then mapped onto the thematic analysis. Table 2 below, identifies the processes involved in the development of sub-themes and themes contained within the data. The fourth column identifies the categories of elite informants mapped onto the thematic analysis.

**Table 2: Development of sub-themes and themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Grouping sub-themes according to commonalities</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Category of elite informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Early childhood practices</td>
<td>Meanings of quality relating to early childhood staff</td>
<td>Meanings of quality associated with professional practice and professionalism, hereafter abbreviated to ‘professional’</td>
<td>Core insiders: Joyce, Avril (n=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Structural features of quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Specialist insiders: Kerry, Rebecca, Laura, Katherine, Sarah, Claire, Barbara (n=7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Qualified staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peripheral insiders: Lisa, Emma, Elizabeth, Jane (n=4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Qualified teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Staff training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Early childhood professionals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the second phase of data analysis, the thematic analysis was read against Bacchi’s (2009) ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach to policy analysis. Previously, in Articles Three, Four and Five, I drew on all six of Bacchi’s questions to analyse policy documents and interview transcripts. However, Bacchi (2009, p. 155) explains that specific questions can be drawn from her WPR approach and applied to data “where the analysis occasions their use”. Hence, in furthering the analysis here in Part Six, I confined my use of Bacchi’s questions to her fifth question: “What effects are produced by the representation of this problem?” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 15). I utilised this fifth question to critically analyse the effects of elite informant
categories (Core, Specialist and Peripheral insiders) on constructions of quality through ‘what they are’, ‘what they do’ and ‘the world in which they live’ (Foucault, 1985, p. 10). For an example of my analytical processes in applying Bacchi’s fifth question, see Appendix 12, p. 275-276.

In the next section, I discuss how quality was understood by particular categories of elite informants. Then, I turn my attention to the effects of these categories on meanings of quality in ECEC policy.

Findings and discussion: Constructing meanings of quality

The importance of quality in ECEC was paramount to all the elite informants that participated in the study. As previously mentioned, meanings of quality were identified as themes of ‘professional’, ‘contextual’ and ‘technical’ (for an explanation of the use of these terms, see Table 2). The ‘keyness’ of a theme was not reliant on the number of times it appeared but whether it captured something important about how particular categories of elite informants ascribed meanings to quality (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Meanings of quality as ‘professional’

All 13 Core, Specialist and Peripheral insiders understood quality as ‘professional’. One Core insider (Avril) explained, it’s [quality] about the culture that’s what quality is, it’s a culture that’s based on the professional expertise. A Specialist insider (Laura) concurred with this explanation by suggesting that, quality is borne by the committed and qualified staff who work there. A Peripheral insider (Lisa) also attributed quality to the knowledge and skills of qualified staff in stating, what made it quality, it was really clear that it was the people who knew what they were doing, the
qualified, early childhood qualified teachers. The extent to which all elite informants constructed quality as ‘professional’ explains, to some degree, emphases in ECEC policy on increasing the number and proportion of highly qualified staff in ECEC. These emphases have been incorporated as a policy solution to the problem of quality in recent times. They are reflected in policy documents associated with the COAG reforms that indicated a need for a more highly qualified workforce in order to improve quality (COAG, 2009).

**Meanings of quality as ‘contextual’**

In total, 10 of the 13 Core, Specialist and Peripheral insiders understood quality as ‘contextual’. One Core insider (Avril) explained:

*I mean engaging the parents, engaging the local community and doing stuff that’s culturally appropriate… if you’ve got a centre which is part of the community, difficult though it is, you still have a sense of ownership and involvement and they [parents] can come in and come out… So to me some of the good signs [of quality] are, do parents feel comfortable about wandering in ... those are the sorts of things if you’re looking for quality.*

This statement suggests quality is related to how well a service connects with the families and the community to which it belongs. There is a sense of shared responsibility between the service, families and community members. The understanding of quality as part of a reciprocal process through connections between children, families, services and the communities in which they live was also highlighted by another Specialist insider (Katherine) who explained:
I find that a pretty useful way to think about what quality for children, families and communities is, you know, what does it deliver back to the community, how does it recognise what the community has, what it doesn’t have, how does it build on those strengths.

This statement embodies notions of community service. It suggests contextual meanings of quality can promote a good fit between the lives of children and families in their local communities. Similar meanings of quality were also highlighted by a Peripheral insider (Emma) who explained:

I would say it [quality] is a combination of fit for the context, the context being the children and families in the community and the service type and in some general and specific way what’s going on around the service…I mean what’s going on in families lives and children’s lives in a very specific sense as well as a more general sense.

Collectively, all three categories of Core, Specialist and Peripheral insiders emphasised the importance of community relevance in their meanings of quality. These meanings promote a shared sense of ownership, belonging and public responsibility. Potentially, they develop shared understandings of quality in ECEC services. In recent times the importance of contextual meanings of quality has, to some extent, been reflected within universal standards that acknowledge contextual appropriateness as an important aspect of quality (COAG, 2009).

Meanings of quality as ‘technical’

Three of the seven Specialist insiders understood quality as ‘technical’. For instance, one Specialist insider (Rebecca) explained:
my view of quality is that you should not just be looking at the standards but where you can improve on every aspect of what you do, so you’re not limited to what’s written down, you can do other things as well.

Another Specialist insider (Sarah) concurred that quality is, continuous improvement, it’s continually looking at what you’re doing, challenging what you’re doing, looking at the outcomes, and trying to make it better. A third Specialist insider (Kerry) emphasised quality could be produced through tightly measurable indicators. This Specialist insider explained:

you could in fact have standards that could then be measured and measured in ways that enabled you to do factor analyses on the data to monitor the relationships between the many indicators of quality and to ascertain the reliability of decisions.

Together, these Specialist insiders emphasised that quality could be understood, to some extent, as objective, comparable and measurable standards. All three Specialist insiders identified here held key roles developing and revising Australia’s first accreditation system. Interestingly, no Core insiders and no Peripheral insiders constructed quality as technical constructions. This omission is surprising given the prevalence of standardised indicators of quality in the Australian child care accreditation system for over two decades. In thinking about this omission, I reflected on how meanings of quality might become ‘sayable’ in political and policy making contexts (Foucault, 1991). To support this supposition, I return to Foucault’s notion that discourses work through people, institutions and practices.

Effects of elite informant categories on meanings of quality
Drawing on the work of Foucault (1980), I argue that in this study, meanings of quality were constructed primarily by a complex interplay between the innermost categories of elite informants, (Core and Specialist insiders), and discourses operating within policy making contexts. Core and Specialist insiders exercised powerful influences on how quality was constructed. However, their experiences shed light on the difficulties they faced in retaining complex meanings of quality in policy making processes.

Indeed, one Core insider explained how institutional practices have effects on the influence a Core insider wields within an organisation. This influence alters how and when meanings are attributed to quality. This Core insider (Joyce) explained:

One of the things you learn in Canberra is that if you’ve been moved out of an area [of policy development] it’s a really good idea not to try to go back in and influence that...it’s called mind your own business...I wasn’t happy with what was happening but whether I was happy or not was completely irrelevant.

This statement contains traces of what is and isn’t possible to speak about meanings of quality in policy making processes. It identifies how this Core insider felt unable to influence how quality was understood once her role had been altered or relinquished. It also suggests that Core insiders act as instruments of government in constructing particular meanings of quality through institutional practices. Specialist insiders also highlighted how institutional practices made some meanings of quality more readily available than others. One Specialist insider (Kerry) explained:

...my views on quality were certainly refined during my time as a [key policy maker for the implementation and revision of Australia’s first accreditation system]. Then again in the late 90’s when [name removed] analysed data as...
part of the review process I described previously, I was forced to think even
more critically about quality and how it could be validly assessed.

This comment suggests particular institutional practices influenced how this
Specialist insider came to think differently about quality when revising the development
of policy for Australia’s accreditation system. There is a sense of challenge concerning
how this insider refined their construction of quality according to tightly measurable
indicators. Specialist insiders also indicated struggles they experienced in political
negotiations regarding the construction of meanings of quality for Australia’s
accreditation system. For instance, another Specialist insider (Sarah) explained:

the rise of [for profit child care corporation name removed] meant there were
more, if you like, market forces at play around quality and who said that was
quality and who said it wasn’t quality. And that led the [organisation] on the
trajectory of coming up with a quantitative measurement [for quality]… the
driver was litigation and the private sector and also [name removed] interest in
measurement.

This Specialist insider reflected on a complex interplay of power relations that
she perceived influenced how meanings were attributed to quality in her experience of
policy making contexts. These statements highlight power relations that bring particular
meanings of quality to the fore and narrow possibilities for others. Foucault’s
explanation of the way power relations operate in discourses is useful here. He suggests
that discourses work in ways that constitute “procedures for exclusion” (Foucault, 1981,
p. 63) about what can and can’t be said, particularly in political contexts.
A Core insider identified how social position (Ball, 1990) works to make certain meanings of quality available in policy making contexts. This Core insider (Joyce) explained:

but don’t let’s forget that about four or five years ago, just before Labor came to power [in 2007] we had several distinguished Americans coming out here propounding the proposition that investment in the early years would increase productivity... and Treasury latched onto that like crazy because productivity is...it’s up there...it’s well past motherhood...you know productivity is the great God...so out of that you also got emphasis that if you’re going to invest in the early years [for quality] then perhaps we’d better have another look at staffing.

This comment suggests the influence of social position and the power of discourses, such as investment discourses, promote particular meanings of quality, in this case associated with qualified staff. Together, these comments from Core and Specialist insiders add weight to Ball’s (1990, p. 18) assertion that meanings “arise not from language but from institutional practices, from power relations, from social position. Words and concepts change their meaning as they are deployed within different discourses.” They support the argument that the innermost categories of Core and Specialist insiders and practices operating in and through discourses influence which meanings of quality become sayable at certain times in policy making contexts.

In comparison, Peripheral insiders did not appear to face the same challenges to retain complex meanings of quality as Core and Specialist insiders. One Peripheral insider (Lisa) explained, our view [about quality] has always been about ensuring what’s been best for children. This comment suggests a sense of consistency between this Peripheral insider’s meanings of quality and those of her organisation. Another
Peripheral insider (Jane) explained, *we took the view that there may be this gold standard [of quality] that we’d like to get to but ... any incremental steps to improve [quality] were better than just sitting still*. Together these comments suggest that Peripheral insiders were concerned with how their particular meanings of quality could gain ascendency in policy making processes and to a lesser extent with struggles to control meanings of quality. Compared to Peripheral insiders, Core and Specialist insiders struggled to ensure that complex meanings of quality were retained in ECEC policy.

Next, I explain difficulties in retaining complex meanings of quality for Core and Specialist insiders in final decisions of ECEC policy. This is important when considering the impact of some policies designed to improve quality in ECEC.

*Problematising shifting meanings of quality within ECEC policy*

The difficulties for retaining complex meanings of quality for Core and Specialist insiders is evident when problematising what is overlooked in some final policy decisions implemented to improve quality. At least two difficulties were revealed for ‘professional’ and ‘contextual’ meanings of quality. For instance, ‘professional’ meanings of quality are connected with highly qualified staff and their practices. In recent times, policies to improve quality in ECEC have emphasised a need for highly qualified staff (COAG, 2009). This emphasis appears laudable. However, when the problem of quality is represented as a lack of highly qualified staff, a policy solution is to increase the number and proportion of highly qualified staff. This solution is made available through discourses of investment (Logan, Sumson & Press, 2015). However, this problem representation overlooks some of the intricacies associated with ‘professional’ meanings of quality. For instance, it neglects the complicated aspects of
work, work environments and working conditions for staff in the ECEC sector. This complexity is not easily addressed only by increasing the numbers and proportion of qualified staff, as there are broader challenges associated with recruiting and retaining a highly qualified early childhood workforce (Cumming, Sumsion & Wong, 2015).

‘Contextual’ meanings of quality are associated with community connectedness. They provide opportunities to reflect the values of culturally and socially diverse communities through a sense of shared ownership and responsibility. Policies to improve quality through ‘contextual’ meanings emphasise increased child and family engagement within local communities, made available through community discourses (Logan, 2017). However, ‘contextual’ meanings of quality do not fit easily with universal standards that entail technical, externally set evaluations of quality. Difficulties may arise for children and families who feel unable to meet externally set evaluations of quality that do not reflect the values of their communities (Hutchins, Frances & Saggers, 2009).

A further consideration is orientation quality in providing ECEC services (OECD, 2006). Orientation quality is the “type and level of attention that a government brings to early childhood policy, e.g. through national legislation, regulation and policy initiatives” (OECD, 2006, p. 127). For over two decades, orientation quality for Australian ECEC has favoured a market system over a public system (Brennan & Mahon, 2011). Commonwealth funding support to parents using private services has resulted in an increase in the supply of child care places by private for profit services.

In 2016, the largest proportion of approved services (46%, n = 6980) operating under the National Quality Framework (NQF) were private for profit services (ACECQA, May 2016). The increase in private for profit services contrasts with an
emphasis on non-profit community owned services embodied in the intent of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) that supported an orientation toward a public child care system. The contextual meanings of quality implicit in the Act, promoted a sense of connectedness, shared ownership and responsibility for child care in local communities. In 2016, 37.5% of not for profit community managed services exceeded the National Quality Standards (NQS) compared to only 17.8% of private for profit services (ACECQA, May 2016). Hence, services with a non-profit community management structure had a better overall quality rating than services with a for profit management structure. These ratings cause us to reflect upon the importance of contextual meanings of quality in child care. They draw some parallels with critiques of market systems that suggest market systems limit the effectiveness of ensuring quality in child care markets (Brennan, Cass, Himmelweit, & Szebehely, 2012).

Conclusion

In concluding Part Six, I return again to Foucault’s notions of the power of discourse that “can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault, 1978, p. 101). The categories of elite informants and discourses operating in policy making contexts highlighted difficulties faced by the innermost categories of Core and Specialist insiders. These difficulties are associated with retaining complex meanings of quality in policy making processes. They corroborate the findings from Article Two (Logan, Sumsion & Press, 2014) that highlight disempowering consequences for some policy elites in policy making contexts.

When complex meanings of quality, such as those pertaining to ‘professional’ and ‘contextual’ constructions are lost or downplayed, they narrow the scope of
possibilities for what quality could be and lead to less comprehensive views of quality. This may bring about an emphasis on simplistic solutions to quality in ECEC policy. As identified previously in Articles Three, Four and Five, which meanings of quality gain ascendency in ECEC policy over others is related to how these meanings become represented as policy problems through prominent discourses. This discussion forms the basis of Article Six, which follows.

Legislation

*Child Care Act 1972 (Cth).*

References

Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). (2016, May). *NQF Snapshot Q1.* Retrieved from ACECQA website: 


Part Seven: Tensions in constructions of quality in Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy history
Preamble to Article Six

Article Six looks back across the entire period under investigation [1972-2009]. The retrospective stance of Article Six and the long time span with which it is concerned distinguishes it from Articles One to Five. In Article One, I set the scene for the study by highlighting an increasing attention to meanings of quality in Australian ECEC policy history. In Article Two, I provide a detailed account of the use of elite interviews. In Articles Three, Four and Five, I focus in-depth and respectively on three historical eras, the early 1970s, early 1990s, and late 2000s.

Article Six, as the concluding article that encompasses the entire period under investigation, reveals tensions and challenges for the future development of ECEC policy that aims to achieve high-quality in Australian ECEC. It highlights how the concept of quality has moved from the periphery of Australian ECEC policy in the early 1970s to becoming a central focus of the COAG reform agenda for early childhood in the late 2000s. At the same time, it highlights how market and investment discourses have constructed quality in ways that have endured whereas other discourses, such as community discourses, have been overshadowed.
Article Six – Tensions in constructions of quality in Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy history.

Tensions in constructions of quality in Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy history

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Abstract

In pronouncements of early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy, the importance of quality appears as a seemingly irrefutable concept. Yet, attention to ECEC policy history reveals tensions between discourses that construct quality in ways that endure whereas other ways are ostensibly forgotten. Drawing on a Foucauldian-influenced poststructuralist framework this article problematises three prominent discourses – of community, markets and investment – that construct quality in diverse ways across 40 or so years of Australian ECEC policy history. Data are drawn from key government policy documents and interviews with influential policy actors engaged in policy making circles between 1972 and 2009. Utilising Bacchi’s (2009) ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ approach to policy analysis reveals tensions between prominent discourses that identify instances of policy forgetting as important sites for policy learning. The article argues that examinations of policy history provide valuable insights about complex explanations of quality in contemporary ECEC policy.

Key words: Quality, discourse, policy, early childhood education and care (ECEC), history.
Introduction

Over recent decades, successive Australian governments have developed ambitious policy goals for early childhood education and care (ECEC) based on improving quality. The importance of quality is widely attributed to improved outcomes for children, families and communities (OECD 2012). To this extent, few governments would contest the importance of quality in ECEC policy. The difficulty is that the concept of quality is open to numerous perspectives and subject to shifting meanings within ECEC policy. Therefore, examinations of quality must take account of how the concept has been framed in past policy in order to provide greater insights about quality in contemporary ECEC policy.

Quality is a multi-dimensional and multi-perspectival concept (Press 2006; Dalli et al. 2011). It is embedded in numerous contexts – social, political, historical – and associated with various stakeholders: children, families, communities, service providers and governments (OECD 2012). A large corpus of international research literature has identified two dominant lines of inquiry about quality in ECEC since the 1960s (Dalli et al. 2011). First, studies that focussed on philosophical debates about the meanings of quality and second studies that focussed on quality variables to measure the impact of quality for children and families. Debates about the meanings of quality attest to the abstract and subjective nature of the concept (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 2007) while other studies, stemming primarily from the US, have identified and measured features of quality in programs for young children (Cassidy et al. 2005). In recent times, increased researcher interest has shifted from identifying and accounting for quality to monitoring variations of quality in early childhood programs. This interest has led to the development of more culturally and contextually relevant measures of quality (Ishimine and Tayler 2014; Tayler, Cleveland, Ishimine, Cloney and Thorpe 2013; Sylva et al.
Collectively, these studies have been influential in focussing government policy toward long-term social and economic benefits of high-quality in ECEC.

A small number of studies have critiqued conceptualisations of quality in government policy (Cottle and Alexander 2012; Fenech 2012; Paananen, Kumpulainen and Lipponen 2015; Tayler 2011). These studies provide valuable examinations of quality but focus primarily on policy developments in contemporary times. However, Penn cautions that focussing on present-day or near present policy initiatives alone is insufficient as ‘policy rationales almost always have roots in the past’ (2011 2). By taking up Penn’s concern, this article reports on a study that examines constructions of quality in Australian ECEC policy history. The study focuses on the period between the introduction of the Child Care Act (Cth) [the Act] in 1972 and the introduction of the National Early Childhood Development Strategy [the Strategy] in 2009 (COAG 2009). This period [1972 – 2009] constitutes a transformative era in Australian ECEC policy history where the concept of quality gained elevated status (Author et al. 2012). By highlighting tensions between three prominent discourses from this period, the article demonstrates how certain explanations of quality can be seemingly downplayed. The question of what quality in ECEC policy could and should be is at the heart of this article.

The article begins with a brief overview of the governance of Australian ECEC for readers not familiar with the Australian context. Second, the methodological approach used in the study on which this article is based is outlined. This approach draws on Foucauldian-influenced perspectives of discourse, knowledge and power relations (Foucault 1972; 1977). Third, three prominent discourses of community, markets and investment reveal how constructions of quality have played out across almost forty years of ECEC policy development. While multiple discourses are
apparent, the article concludes by drawing attention to how tensions between community, market and investment discourses construct quality in ways that remain prominent while other ways appear overshadowed. This overshadowing diminishes possibilities for insights into complex explanations of quality in ECEC. Consequently support for high-quality ECEC provision in contemporary Australian policy reforms may lead to less than optimal initiatives.

Governance of Australian ECEC

Historically, the Australian ECEC context has been characterised by a range of service types for young children and a range of legislative and regulatory requirements. Typically, these requirements have been divided between the Commonwealth Government, sometimes referred to as the Federal Government, and the six State and two Territory Governments. However, between 2007 and 2013 the Council of Australian Government (COAG) introduced major national policy reforms to improve the quality of ECEC provisions across Australia (Brennan and Adamson 2012). These initiatives, outlined in the Strategy (COAG 2009), included universal access to quality in ECEC for all children in the year prior to school, streamlined regulatory approaches, National Quality Standards (NQS), a national curriculum document – the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), a new rating system and national workforce initiatives for the early childhood sector (COAG 2009). Effectively, these initiatives and others relating to Indigenous children and health issues aimed to provide access to high-quality in ECEC.

Policy, discourse and problematisations: Australian ECEC policy and the concept of quality

The term policy, as used here, refers to documents such as written speeches, key government policy documents and processes, such as the enactment of ideas through
conversations and interactions with people to produce policy texts (Ball 2008). Policies are historically and politically shaped by discourses in the context of policy production. Foucault (1990 100) highlights this connection when he states ‘it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together’. Yet for Foucault, discourses not only gather ideas together as truth claims but also produce subject positions, such as children, parents, managers and consumers, from which it is possible to think, speak, know and act. Therefore, discourses bring about effects in policy rationales that privilege certain ways of thinking about quality in ECEC over others.

**Methods: Data selection and analysis**

In keeping with Foucauldian perspectives of discourse and related notions of policy problematisations, the study employed a ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach to policy analysis (Bacchi 2009) which uses six sequential questions (see Appendix 1). The study’s intention was to analyse how discourses frame the concept of quality in ECEC policy and provide insights into power relations that emphasise how and why certain constructions of quality gain pre-eminence over others.

The data set was drawn from two sources: key government policy documents and interviews with elite policy informants. First, a process of mapping was undertaken to select government policy documents that identified historical and contemporary debates about quality in ECEC. The selected documents, identified in Table 1, comprised legislation, key expressions of government policy and commissioned reports to inform the development of ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009.

**Table 1: Policy documents analysed in the study.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government policy documents</th>
<th>Type of document</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Child Care Act 1972 (Cth)</td>
<td>Legislation</td>
<td>A legislative Act acknowledging the provision of significant Commonwealth Government involvement in the provision of child care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Labor’s Plan for High Quality Child Care (Rudd and Macklin 2007b).</td>
<td>Government document</td>
<td>A key document of the Rudd Government’s election policy platform for ECEC, publicly available from October</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4 An exhaustive search for the Interim National Child Care Accreditation Council (1992) *Quality, affordable, childcare, Australia-wide: Final report* was undertaken; however, this document was unable to be located.
Second, elite policy informants with specialized knowledge of ECEC policy making processes across the period under investigation were recruited by an invitational letter outlining the study. Transcripts of 13 individual semi-structured interviews with these elite policy informants were drawn upon to capture the socio-historical contexts and political spheres of influence in policy production (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). Although transcripts from all elite informants were drawn upon for the broader study, for the purposes of this article, specific extracts from the transcripts of four elite informants have been included. The four informants cited here had particular involvement in the policy making events under discussion and their insights draw attention to discourses relevant to quality that are now overshadowed.

References to specific extracts from elite informants, not included here, have been reported previously (see Logan, Sumsion and Press 2013; Logan, Sumsion and Press 2014; Logan, Sumsion and Press 2015) and were beyond the scope of this article. A detailed discussion of the methodology surrounding elite interviews can be found.
elsewhere (see for example, Logan, Sumsion and Press 2014). Table 2 describes the elite informants referred to in the study. All informants have been de-identified through the use of pseudonyms.

Table 2: A description of elite informants interviewed as part of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms of policy elite informants</th>
<th>Type of interview conducted</th>
<th>Period of professional activity in policy making circles</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Avril</td>
<td>In-depth individual semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Early 1970s – present</td>
<td>Former senior policy advisor, academic and current social commentator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Barbara</td>
<td>In-depth individual semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Early 1970s – present</td>
<td>Former academic and Chief Executive Officer of a large ECEC organisation and current policy advisor during the development of the COAG reforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sarah</td>
<td>In-depth individual semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Early 1970s – present</td>
<td>Former senior bureaucrat, former Chair of a large ECEC governing body and current policy advisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-depth</td>
<td>Individual semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Time Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Late 1970s – present</td>
<td>Former academic and senior policy advisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Late 1980s – late 1990s</td>
<td>Former union official active in policy making circles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Early 1970s – mid 2000s</td>
<td>Former senior policy advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Time Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>In-depth individual semi-structured telephone interview</td>
<td>Early 1970s – mid 2000s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>In-depth individual semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Early 1980s – present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>In-depth individual semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Early 1990s – present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Approach to the analyses**

The approach to the analyses involved two phases. First, sections of text were selected where they referred directly to the term quality and/or references that had inherent connections to quality – for example, excerpts that referred to the practices of qualified staff that promote positive outcomes for children. These sections of text, whether extracts from policy documents or transcripts from elite interviews, were read and re-read to identify patterns within the data. These patterns were grouped into sub-themes and later clustered into common themes.
Second, Bacchi’s WPR approach (2009) was utilised by applying six sequential questions to identify how policy problems, elaborated in discourses, shaped the concept of quality across the period under investigation. This approach identified and examined how underlying assumptions and meanings attributed to quality were represented in the data. While multiple discourses were apparent, three prominent discourses – community, market and investment – were identified. For example, concepts such as ‘good quality child care facilities’, ‘government-assisted centres’, and ‘available to the community in future years’ shaped notions broadly referred to as community discourses. The same process was applied to identify concepts associated with ‘choice’, ‘availability and affordability’ as referring to market discourses and concepts such as ‘long-term economic and societal benefits’ as connected to investment discourses. These discourses, discussed below, highlighted tensions that bring about discursive effects for constructions of quality in ECEC policy.

**Discourses of community, markets and investment: Implications for constructions of quality in ECEC policy.**

The analysis reported below reveals how market and investment discourses contribute to constructions of quality that emphasise national economic contexts, whereas community discourses that emphasise local and relational constructions of quality are somewhat downplayed.

**Community discourses**

Notions of community were evident in child care policy in the early 1970s. For example, the Act marked the introduction of extensive Commonwealth Government involvement in funding child care at a time of rapid social change (Author et al. 2013; Brennan and Adamson 2012). When introducing the Bill for the Act to Parliament,
Minister Lynch explained ‘Child care centres will be community oriented. This is implicit in the references I have made to their impact on the community’ (House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972 Second Reading Speech 2294). Shortly, after the introduction of the Act, subsequent policies expressed by the Government and Opposition reinforced notions of community by confirming ‘the resulting services should be community-based; that parents should be involved and that local governments and community groups should receive a role’ (Australian Government Social Welfare Commission 1974 13). It was in this context that fixed grants, often referred to as supply-side funding, were available to approved non-profit organisations to provide child care services. This policy emphasised support for quality through the provision of government funding for the employment of qualified staff and funding for public child care facilities in local communities. It was based on notions that parent and community ownership of non-profit services would support the development of strong social networks and be unlikely to lead to exploitation of children and families. While not without challenges, especially in communities with low levels of parent/community resources, this policy increased levels of responsibility for community members and parents by positioning them as democratic citizens in the design and management of services (Press 1999). Through doing so, it supported the development of a relationship between the Commonwealth Government and local communities.

Claire, another policy elite informant in the study, explained the importance of relationships for shaping understandings of quality, particularly in remote regional communities, when she explained:

... I visited [name of remote regional community] and the community were camped just outside of [name of neighbouring remote regional community], because their community was washed away in the cyclone and they’re just rebuilding it [the children’s service] now ... the families that used the
service in [name of remote regional community removed], you know quality has a totally different meaning for them, and for their children as well. Their aspirations and expectations are very different… *(Claire, former teacher, policy advocate and state president of a private child care association)*.

Claire’s comments illustrate her perception that understandings of quality are closely connected to children, families and their local communities. Accordingly, families and community members need opportunities to actively shape understandings of quality in their local contexts by co-constructing knowledge about children, child-rearing practices, expertise and culture. This role supports children’s learning in early childhood services (OECD 2012). When parents and community members have greater levels of decision making in the design, type and management of services, they have increased power that goes beyond sharing information about their children and families and promotes equal partnerships between parents, educators and service providers.

Community discourses emphasise relationships, values and approaches to constructing quality in ECEC that are adapted to local contexts through the active engagement of children, families and community members at each feasible level of decision making in services. A result of this view is that community discourses lead to greater child, family and community power and social cohesion that can be difficult to articulate in policy.

In contemporary times, however, this relationship has somewhat changed. Avril, an elite policy informant in the study, highlighted her perceptions of a distancing of relationship between government and local communities over several decades when she explained:

...in the early stages when the funding, under the old Child Care Act, was a proportion of salaries, there was no fee subsidy as such. You just got a lump that you would then distribute amongst your users [approved child care centres]...there was a contract between the government and the centre to provide the service which means it [the government] saw itself as that relationship ...
[now] you’ve just got this situation where you depend on some sort of distant government body and the only power that distant government body has is to remove your right to claim fee relief or child care tax rebate (Avril, former senior policy advisor, academic and current social commentator).

Avril’s perspective highlights her sense of a distancing of relationship between the Commonwealth government and centres within local communities. This distancing has been described more generally in educational policy research as moves from ‘government to governance’ (Lingard 2011 357).

**Market discourses**

In contrast to community discourses, market discourses reconstruct child, family and community power as consumer power. This reconstruction shifts an emphasis from children, families and community members as contributors to quality to purchasers of quality. When positioned in mixed child care markets, this shift has implications for how quality is re-constructed through notions of competition and choice.

The analysis identified an increased reliance on ‘free’ markets to improve quality in Australian child care policy rationales from the early 1990s through a language of ‘productivity’ ‘competition’, ‘choice’ and ‘funding commercial child care’, particularly for increased women’s workforce participation. For example, then Prime Minister Hawke in his 1990 election campaign policy speech explained ‘In the task of national mobilisation to build a more productive and competitive economy, the women of Australia have a key role’ (1990 8) and ‘It is a commitment to give women a full say, a real choice and a fair go’ (1990 8). On this basis, policy rationales coupled notions of ‘choice’ for women’s workforce participation with ‘choice’ of child care, regardless of service type. These notions supported policy to open funding to the commercial child care sector. Yet, Brennan (2007) points out that as the 1990s unfolded, particularly during the Howard Coalition government years [1996 – 2007], child care policies based
on the expansion of places offered little genuine choice, especially for low income families, and compromised provisions of quality in order to maximise profits.

Subsequent findings from Harris (2008) found that many parents in regional and remote areas had little, if any, choice. Therefore, policy based on market assumptions that parents can choose, influence and purchase the quality of child care become illogical if no serious choice is available. These seemingly flawed assumptions lead to questions about the ability of market-based systems to effectively maximise provisions of high-quality in ECEC.

The Hawke election campaign policy speech (1990) connected choice and competition with a simultaneous announcement to develop a quality accreditation system to improve quality in child care. Although regulatory and accreditation systems have contributed to improved levels of quality (Author et al. 2015; Ishimine and Tayler 2014), the analysis highlighted instances where a reliance on standards compared to other aspects of quality, such as the practices of highly qualified staff and a commitment to family and community engagement, can lead to narrower understandings of quality (OECD 2006). This narrowing was alluded to by Katherine, a policy informant in the study. Katherine explained:

the dominant one [aspect of quality] is ... the technicist kind ... that [if] we have these standards in place, these kind of inputs then, we will get quality because we can define the inputs, and I think you know that research around [structural] quality ... you know, qualifications of the educator, the ratios, and so on, has been incredibly important in raising the standard, but it’s not the whole story...(Katherine, current academic and policy advisor active in policy making circles from the 1980s onwards).

Katherine’s reference to the ‘whole story’ alludes to understandings of quality that are not always evident in policy. These understandings include constructions of
quality that go beyond improving measurable outcomes and take account of local and relational contexts. For example, Katherine also identified tensions between market discourses and professional learning opportunities in local contexts for an early childhood educator. Katherine explained:

She [an early childhood educator] was working in a private for-profit centre, but she was a member of a community of practice of other directors [from different service types] and for her she felt they had so much to learn from each other but she had information that she had to treat as commercial in confidence that she couldn’t share because of her allegiance to her employer and so she felt very conflicted a lot of the time. (Katherine, current academic and policy advisor active in policy making circles from the 1980s onwards).

Katherine’s example highlights her perception of tensions between market discourse and notions of community that can limit professional learning for educators. When learning opportunities based on educators’ professional relationships and mutual co-operation conflict with business practices these tensions potentially diminish provisions of quality.

**Investment discourses**

While market discourses continue to endure in ECEC policy, investment discourses became prominent in the COAG reforms (COAG 2009). Investment discourses promote the importance of high-quality for long-term social and economic gains (Author et al. 2015; Brennan and Adamson 2012). They are associated with investments in human resources (Paananen, Kumpulainen and Lipponen 2015) and support notions of economic prosperity through the contributions parents and children make as productive and future productive citizens to a national economy. For example, the Strategy (COAG 2009) outlined key initiatives for early childhood commencing with a visionary statement that ‘all children have the best start in life to create a better
future for themselves and for the nation’ (COAG 2009 4). Couched in terms to ‘improve child outcomes’, ‘increase workforce productivity’ and remain ‘internationally competitive’, investment discourses provide powerful prospects for policy makers of greater returns on investments in the early years than returns made later in a child’s life.

For example, former Prime Minister Rudd, as part of his policy platform in the lead up to the 2007 Commonwealth election, announced Labor’s plan to ‘invest $77 million over four years to strengthen our child care workforce and improve the quality of the early learning and care that our children receive’ (Rudd and Macklin 2007 8). In keeping with Labor’s Plan to improve quality, the Strategy further explained:

National effort to improve child outcomes will in turn contribute to increased social inclusion, human capital and productivity in Australia. It will help ensure Australia is well placed to meet social and economic challenges in the future and remain internationally competitive (COAG 2009 4).

It was in this context that investment discourses made quality a pre-eminant concept in ECEC policy connected to a language of ‘stronger standards’, ‘highly qualified staff’ and ‘higher numbers of qualified staff’. Investment discourses have led to an emphasis on quality in ECEC beyond short-term considerations of cost and supply toward longer term benefits for children and society. Lisa, a policy elite informant in the study, explained her perception of the power of investment discourses in elevating quality as a key concept in ECEC policy:

We couldn’t get there (elevate the importance of quality in ECEC policy) until we got these broader arguments (economic arguments) in place beside us. But in going forward I think it’s really, really important that those arguments don’t come in over the top and we lose the thing about what’s good for children ... what creates the quality environment for children. If the other arguments (economic arguments) take over you have a very shallow understanding of what the teacher means, any old teacher will do (Lisa, former Chief Executive Officer
Lisa’s comments also warn about tensions within investment discourses if they emphasise the importance of quality in ECEC primarily for economic outcomes. This warning resonates somewhat with Avril, who re-iterated her perspective of diminishing provisions of quality that are connected to notions of community. Avril explained:

...the only rationale for early childhood is not the social ones, the relational ones, the happy human beings or whatever it might be. It is very solidly future workforce participation. So we’ve got workforce participation; the parents now and workforce participation of the children in the future... So we’ve lost the sense that a service is a service because it is part of a community (Avril, former senior policy advisor, academic and current social commentator).

Avril’s comments highlight her perception of tensions between investment discourses that emphasise economic outcomes over community discourses that emphasise social and relational outcomes. A focus on economic outcomes shifts an emphasis on quality toward the contribution it makes in terms of value for money. Moreover, it tends to shift meanings of quality away from less easily measured benefits of highly qualified staff and greater levels of child, family and community connectedness. The next section outlines implications for quality if market and investment discourses endure and remain prominent in ECEC policy.

Looking ahead: Implications for enduring market and investment discourses for provisions of quality in ECEC

Market and investment discourses have endured in ways that have powerful effects on provisions of quality in ECEC. For example, Kohler (2015) cites one rapidly
expanding Sydney-based child care chain of services that faced a choice between offering a premium or budget-priced service in order to remain financially viable. The choice was based upon business acumen that forecast mid-market services would struggle to survive in contemporary markets (Kohler 2015). The Sydney-based chain, which operates 29 centres with the possibility of opening 15 more, eventually opted for a premium service that included a nutritionist, a Smartphone app for parents to view their child’s activities while attending child care and an increase in the price of the service. This example highlights at least three tensions for provisions of quality in ECEC. First, it raises questions about how the concept is promoted in ways that influence parent (read consumers) understandings of quality. Cleveland and Krashinsky (2009) note profit motives can lead businesses to offer superficial evidence of costly quality in order to maintain financial viability in competitive markets. Second, market forces influence service providers to construe quality in ways that promote service viability but in doing so may lead to polarised levels of quality. A polarising effect between premium and budget-priced services is likely to lead to varying levels of quality in ECEC services. These effects place heavy responsibilities on regulatory and accreditation systems to monitor and arbitrate uniformly high levels of quality across service types and on parents as choosers and purchasers of quality. Third, the example highlights challenges for government policy initiatives aimed at ensuring improved social outcomes through equitable access to quality, particularly if economic emphases within market and investment discourses prevail. Thus, government initiatives to provide universal access to ECEC may be achievable but ensuring this access is high-quality for all Australian children is likely to remain a challenge.

Conclusion
This article highlights that the concept of quality has moved from the periphery of Australian ECEC policy in the early 1970s to a focus of the COAG reform agenda for early childhood. It identifies three prominent discourses – community, market and investment – that construct the concept of quality in diverse ways across almost 40 years of ECEC policy history. In the main, policy texts consistently identified a growing recognition of the importance of quality for children, families and communities. Initially, this recognition was through the provision of government funding to community owned centre-based child care throughout the 1970s; the development of a quality accreditation system in the 1990s; and references to quality as a key feature of the COAG reforms for early childhood outlined in the Strategy (COAG 2009). However, while all three discourses were evident in ECEC policy across the identified period [1972 – 2009], the centrality of quality for children, families and communities is somewhat altered by tensions within discourses that emphasise the centrality of quality for the Australian economy. An enduring emphasis on market and investment discourses that favours national economic contexts overshadows discourses of community that are connected to local and relational contexts. Potentially, these effects risk losing what makes quality unique in local ECEC contexts. These tensions create challenges for achieving high-quality in ECEC in ways that may not be easily resolved in future policy developments.

Returning to Foucauldian perspectives of ways power and knowledge operate in discourse, the adoption of policy initiatives that promote high-quality in ECEC through increased levels of public infrastructure and government responsibility appear unlikely, especially in times of national economic restraint. Yet the intention here is not to idealise notions of community from the 1970s. Instead, this article draws attention to opportunities for policy learning about comprehensive views of quality that support
greater emphases on local and relational contexts of quality within ECEC policy. Whether tensions within market and investment discourses will ensure contextually relevant and equitable access to high-quality in ECEC services for all Australian children and families remains to be seen. Therefore, there is a need to investigate how comprehensive views of quality can be embedded in future ECEC policy.
Appendix 1: What’s the problem represented to be? An approach to policy analysis

1. What’s the problem (e.g. the problem of uneven quality in ECEC) represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?
3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
4. What is left unpromblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?
6. How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced? (Bacchi 2009 2).

Legislation

Child Care Act 1972 (Cth).


References


Part Eight: Conclusion
Conclusion

The study reported in this thesis has asked the question: *How has quality been constructed in government policy concerning centre-based long day care in Australia between 1972 and 2009?* In addressing this question, the study elucidates historical contexts in which ECEC policies developed during a transformative period of policy change [1972 – 2009]. The question has been generative in identifying conditions that have influenced the direction of particular policy trajectories; deepening understandings of policy making processes and the bearing of past policy rationales on present-day ECEC policies, particularly concerning quality; and in revealing similarities and shifts between past and present-day policies. The findings of the study can assist researchers, policy makers, early childhood advocates and pre-service teachers to see constructions of quality in present-day policies more clearly and to anticipate constructions of quality in future policy. In doing so, the study demonstrates how quality has been constructed in Australian ECEC policy as both a product of its contemporaneous context and the influence of previous policy. This is a timely contribution as high-quality in ECEC appears likely to remain a central policy focus for the Australian Government, at least until 2017 (Department of Education and Training, 2016).

This conclusion elaborates on these ideas. First, I synthesise key findings of the study and its contributions to existing policy studies. Further, I acknowledge the limitations of my study and suggest possible future research directions. In the final section of this conclusion, I reflect on how my experience of doctoral studies has changed me and provide some concluding thoughts that draw the thesis to a close.
Key findings of the study

The study’s examination of how quality has been constructed in government policy concerning Australian centre-based long day care has generated a number of important findings. First, the study identified how the concept of quality moved from the periphery of child care policy debates in 1972 to a central tenet of the National Early Childhood Development Strategy for ECEC in 2009. In brief, the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) played a pivotal role in establishing quality in child care as a key policy consideration for children’s welfare, albeit secondary to considerations of generating the supply of child care places to support parental workforce participation. By the early 1990s, predominant market discourses framed child care in terms of privatisation and consumer choice. Within these market discourses, quality was supposedly determined by market forces and constructed as an assurance for parents as purchasers of child care services. Investment discourses to improve quality in ECEC, and thereby improve outcomes for children, were prominent in the National Quality Reform Agenda (COAG, 2009a) by the late 2000s. The COAG reforms for early childhood constructed quality as a pre-eminent concept through discourses of investment in stronger standards and qualified staff. An emphasis on investment discourses to improve quality in ECEC gave some prominence to children in government policy. Moreover, this emphasis aligned Australian ECEC policy more closely with characteristics that are considered to contribute to quality in ECEC (OECD, 2012).

Second, the study identified tensions between market and investment discourses that potentially constrain possibilities for constructions of quality. The COAG reforms, in framing quality in ECEC as an investment that would result in future productivity and national economic gains, included requirements for the employment of a higher proportion of degree-qualified educators than was previously mandated under most
state/territory regulations. In addition, educators are now required to implement a new curriculum framework, reflecting important steps toward improving quality in ECEC. However, there may be tensions associated with supporting and retaining well-qualified staff in a sector in which the majority of ECEC services operate as for-profit businesses. Overlooking these tensions exerts downward pressure on contributors to quality if support for the ongoing professional development of well-qualified staff is at odds with service aims to achieve profitability and affordability. My study suggests there is a case for policy makers to re-think how ECEC policy can support the ongoing professional learning of well-qualified staff in order to exert upward pressure on quality in ECEC.

Third, the study identified three prominent discourses – community, markets and investment – that privilege certain constructions of quality in ECEC over others. Article Six, for example, highlights how the prominence of market and investment discourses has overshadowed the prominence of community discourses across the period under investigation [1972 – 2009]. Investment discourses have led to valuable increases in resources for the early childhood sector. Shifts within market and investment discourses to support increased parental workforce participation and national productivity, however, emphasise the importance of quality as a channel for future economic gains. As identified in Article Six, this emphasis overshadows community discourses that construct quality in ways that are broad in scope, contextually relevant to local communities, not easily measured and based on non-monetary local and relational constructions of quality. The overshadowing of community discourses, in effect, diminishes space for rich and complex constructions of quality for community well-being that are not connected to future economic returns.

Fourth, the study identified path dependencies evident in the Australian ECEC policy context. Identifying path dependencies provides explanations as to why some
contemporary policies appear to reflect similar policy trajectories to those that have gone before. For instance, the *Child Care Act (1972) (Cth)* emphasised the importance of quality through the employment of qualified staff in child care but distinguished between the type of staff qualifications required. This distinction specified the employment of teachers to work primarily with children three years of age and older, enabling these children access to a teacher-led program, whereas children younger than three years were less likely to have the same access (Logan, Sumsion & Press, 2013). Although qualification requirements have changed since this Act, a similar distinction persists more than 40 years later. For example, in 2013, 16 per cent of paid contact staff working in ECEC services held a three- or four-year early childhood related degree qualification or above (Social Research Centre, 2014). This small percentage, and requirements for these staff to deliver a preschool program to four and five year old children for 15 hours per week and 40 weeks per year (COAG, 2009b), suggests children younger than three years of age will remain less likely to have access to a teacher-led early childhood program (Fenech, Giugni & Bown, 2012; Productivity Commission, 2011). Further, while the *Child Care Act 1972 (Cth)* also stressed the employment of qualified teachers as contributors to quality in child care (Logan, Sumsion & Press, 2013), the challenge of employing, and increasing the proportion of, qualified early childhood teachers in ECEC remains a concern in present-day times, particularly in long day care (Cumming, Sumsion & Wong, 2015; Productivity Commission, 2011). These examples of path dependencies raise issues for policy makers engaged in contemporary policy making, as they suggest that policy paths once adopted lend themselves more easily to incremental change than dramatic policy shifts, thereby making significant policy change for quality in ECEC difficult to achieve.
Fifth, the study identified that past policy moves to improve quality over almost 40 years have been characterised by a small number of dramatic policy shifts. These shifts have been conceptualised in the study as critical junctures. The identification of two critical junctures – the first signalled by the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) and the second signalled by the 1990 Hawke policy speech (Hawke, 1990) – provide insights into the influence of macro-contextual factors on the production of policy rationales. Although macro-contextual factors, such as social, political and economic dynamics, are not directly related to quality in ECEC policy per se, the study identified how they can lead to dramatic changes in the direction of policy. The Hawke policy speech (Hawke, 1990), for example, triggered the privatisation and marketisation of Australian long day care and simultaneously announced the development of Australia’s first child care quality improvement and accreditation system (the QIAS). The introduction of the QIAS [1994 – 2011] brought about much needed improvements to quality in child care. This change in policy direction brought about new systems and structures, such as the QIAS, that profoundly impacted on understandings and enactments of quality in child care. Thus, deep understandings of critical junctures provide useful knowledge that may assist researchers, policy makers and early childhood advocates in anticipating how and why policy trajectories, particularly concerning quality, might play out in future ECEC policies.

Key contributions of the study to existing policy studies

The study contributes historical perspectives to policy studies pertaining to constructions of quality in ECEC. It brings to light particular inheritances from past policy. Many studies focus on identifying, measuring, monitoring and evaluating quality (Ishimine & Tayler, 2014) but few studies provide knowledge of the historical contexts in which quality assumed precedence in ECEC policy. In doing so, the study contributes
new insights and substantive knowledge about lesser known facets of past policy making processes.

First, the study adds to an emerging corpus of international ECEC policy studies (see for example, Bradley, 2011) and Australian ECEC policy studies (see for example, Bown, Sumsion & Press, 2011; Hunkin, 2016) that suggest interviews with policy elites can uncover lesser known facets of policy production. As examples, Article Two sheds light on the usefulness of elite interviewing methodology to deepen understandings of policy production while Article Four highlights the ideological standpoints, compromises and personal risks encountered by policy elites in the development of Australia’s first QIAS. In illuminating the complexities of policy production, the study provides insights into how constructions of quality were shaped by political and ideational change. These insights contribute to deepening understandings of policy production for policy makers, early childhood advocates and pre-service teachers engaged in studies of early childhood policy history.

Second, the study contributes knowledge of an Australian ECEC policy study that may be useful for international policy makers who are thinking about ways they might improve quality in their respective policy contexts. The study provides critique about the effects of shifts within investment discourses in ECEC policy. Potentially, shifts within investment discourses construct quality in de-contextualised ways. Other policy studies (see for example, Paananen et al., 2015) warn that shifts within investment narratives can lead to less nuanced constructions of quality in ECEC. By adding weight to these warnings, my study contributes another example for policy learning about potential threats to rich and complex constructions of quality. Moreover, my study may be useful for international policy makers when anticipating how they might conceive of, and construct, quality in future policy making rationales.
Third, the study contributes knowledge of critical junctures as a way to expand thinking about policy production in Australian ECEC. Critical junctures have been described variously in studies of policy development (see for example, Pierson, 2004; 2005), social policy (see for example, Gal & Bargal, 2002), and macro-economic policy (see for example, Hogan & Doyle, 2007). A small number of studies conceptualise critical junctures in studies of ECEC policy history (see for example, Borchorst, 2009). The conceptualisation of critical junctures and their use in analysing in Australian ECEC policies, as identified in this study, provides a tool for understanding how macro-contextual factors and professional initiatives contribute to dramatic shifts in ECEC policy trajectories. Applying this conceptualisation moves thinking about shifts in the trajectories of ECEC policies forward. It provides a theoretical tool that goes beyond the concept of the ‘political gaze’, as mentioned previously in Article One, because it highlights how macro-contextual factors lead to major turning points in ECEC policy. This conceptualisation opens up possibilities for deepening understandings of policy shifts in a range of policy studies.

These understandings contribute insights that may assist early childhood educators and advocates to anticipate how macro-contextual factors, well beyond ECEC related issues, can influence policy rationales that construct quality in particular ways.

Limitations of the study

As outlined above, this study makes several contributions to the research and policy literature. However, it also has several limitations. First, its focus has been solely on the Australian ECEC policy context [1972 – 2009]. As policy contexts vary widely from country to country, the findings may not be readily applicable to international contexts.
A second limitation is the endpoint of the study in 2009. In the two years immediately following a new Act, the *Education and Care Services Law Act 2010* (Cth) and new regulations, the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* (Cth), were passed. Both the Act and Regulations contained important national ECEC reforms pertaining to quality. However, at the time of commencing my study in 2009, neither the introduction of this Act or the Regulations could have been anticipated. Moreover, the constraints of a doctoral project precluded extending the scope of the study to cover ongoing developments from 2009 to the present.

A third limitation concerns the value laden nature of policy research. I acknowledge my reasons for undertaking this study reflect my experiences, initially as an early childhood teacher and more recently as a lecturer specialising in early childhood education at Charles Sturt University. While I endeavoured to practice self-reflexivity (Tracy, 2010) to establish trustworthiness and transparency in all aspects of my research, I acknowledge that my selection of texts, and my analysis and interpretation of the data have been influenced by my beliefs about quality in ECEC. As such, they present an interpretation of events.

A fourth limitation concerns my use of a history of the present. My use of history could be viewed by some historians as problematic as some historical researchers disagree with the use of present-day understandings to interpret historical events. As identified in Part Two of the thesis and also in Article Three, I acknowledge some of the challenges associated with my approach and how I sought to guard against them, particularly in relation to the dangers of presentism and problematising historical accounts (Castel, 1994). As also previously mentioned in Article Three, I sought to avoid those dangers by adhering to three approaches in my data analysis. These approaches involved reading widely from policy documents and other historical
accounts from the period prior to and across the period of investigation [1972 – 2009]. In addition, I focussed closely on the questions posed in my data analysis to deepen understandings about contexts and the role of policy in which policy documents were written. As well, I engaged in processes of researcher reflexivity (Brew, 1998).

A fifth limitation concerns the cohort of elite informants who participated in the study. Although this cohort reflected different policy perspectives that spanned the period of investigation [1972 – 2009], a relatively small pool of informants (n=13) does not provide a representative sample for how all policy informants across the period of investigation construct meanings of quality in ECEC policy. Thus, generalisations cannot be drawn from the study. Further, the views of the informants were skewed toward the community sector with one informant (n=1) representing the private sector. The lack of private sector representation could have also affected the findings.

Future research directions

In this section, I outline three possible directions for future research: investigating constructions of quality in present-day ECEC policy reforms; applying a critical junctures framework to key concepts related to quality in ECEC policy; and furthering investigations of quality in ECEC policy from the recent past.

1. Investigating constructions of quality in present-day ECEC policy reforms.

The study provides a starting point for furthering investigations of constructions of quality in contemporary ECEC policy beyond the 2009 end-point of the current study. Future studies could investigate contemporary policy changes concerning constructions of quality between the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (Cth) and the present. While some work has already been undertaken, (see for
example, Fenech, Giugni & Bown, 2012; Hunkin, 2016; Jackson, 2015a; 2015b), there is scope to elicit perspectives of elite policy informants involved in the National Quality Framework concerning present-day policy reforms and thus build on the present study. These investigations could contribute new perspectives that would be potentially useful for informing the development of future ECEC policies.

2. Applying a critical juncture framework to other key concepts in ECEC policy.

Applying a critical juncture framework, as identified in the study, to other key concepts emphasised in ECEC policy, such as the concept of leadership (Brownlee, Nailon & Tickle, 2010) and professional development (Clarkin-Phillips, 2011), would also be a useful focus for future research. By identifying how critical junctures and their related discourses have shaped key concepts of leadership and professional development in ECEC, new knowledge about how these concepts are considered to contribute to quality can be generated. Such investigations would provide deep insights into how policy and political concerns mould and re-mould key concepts in ECEC policy. In doing so, this framework could serve as a broadly applicable methodological tool for researchers.

3. Furthering investigations of quality in ECEC policy developments from the recent past.

The study focussed on the data set (see Part Two, Table 1, pp.46-48) drawn from a large corpus of data (see Appendix 8). This data corpus provides additional opportunities for policies as sites of in-depth examination. For instance, processes, events and policy documents from the mid-1980s that led to section 11 of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth) being repealed. Potentially, these documents provide additional
sites for in-depth examinations of the connections between shifts in funding models and constructions of quality in ECEC. Moreover, these investigations would utilise the power of the recent past to bring lesser known details of the Australian early childhood policy landscape to light and provide opportunities for policy learning.

Implications for policy makers and early childhood advocates

In this section, I raise implications for policy makers and early childhood advocates about path dependencies and discourses at work in ECEC policy. In raising these implications, I suggest a historically oriented approach to policy making has much to offer policy makers and early childhood advocates. A historically oriented approach draws on deep understandings of ECEC policy histories. It can have powerful effects on the direction of future policy by providing a long view of policy rationales that have gone before. My engagement with policy histories has, at times, revealed startling similarities between past and present-day policies along with long periods of incremental change and brief moments of dramatic policy change. These continuities and discontinuities raise questions for policy makers and early childhood advocates. For instance, what themes and discourses have travelled from one historical era to another? What new themes and discourses have emerged at particular policy making moments and why? And how might this knowledge fit into an approach for developing future ECEC policies? These questions also have resonance with Ball’s (2008, p.55) explanation that policy “always has to be viewed in terms of both change and continuity – what changes and what stays the same.” It is these questions and this explanation that have implications for how policy makers and early childhood advocates might consider the residual and emerging effects of path dependencies and discourses evident in present-day ECEC policies. My intention here, is not to suggest that past policies provide clear explanations for understanding present-day policies. Rather, I suggest a
historically oriented approach provides another means for thinking about the complexities and issues pertaining to the development of future ECEC policies.

**Personal reflections**

As I explained in the Introduction, the impetus for my doctoral study was motivated by two key experiences. First, my teaching experiences in early childhood services that sparked my curiosity about the concept of quality in ECEC policy. Second, my recent experiences as a lecturer in early childhood teacher education where I observed a disconnection between pre-service teachers’ understandings of early childhood policy histories and present-day policy developments. As I reflect on my engagement in doctoral studies, I realise how this experience has changed my understandings of the complexities of ECEC policy production. Prior to undertaking doctoral studies, my understanding of policy histories reflected knowledge of key ECEC policies but less understanding of the contexts in which they were produced. My experience has deepened my knowledge of the social, political and economic dynamics that influence policy production. This knowledge, particularly concerning shifts in meanings for constructions of quality, has implications for my university teaching. First, it has changed how I understand the complexities of policy production. I plan to use these new understandings in my teaching to illustrate how present-day ECEC policies continue to be structured by inheritances from the past. Second, it has changed my approach to teaching. My past experiences of teaching ECEC policy histories have been somewhat formulaic and based primarily on policy content rather than the complexities of policy production. By drawing on examples from my doctoral studies, I plan to provide more opportunities for lively engagement and informed policy critique of contemporary ECEC policies. I hope this approach will inspire pre-service teachers
studying ECEC policy histories and support the development of deep understandings about why key concepts, such as quality, have been shaped in particular ways.

Concluding thoughts

In drawing this thesis to a close I return to the words of Bennett (2004) in the epigraph of Article One: that the recent past is ‘dead ground’ and we don’t see it because of its proximity to the present. To this I add Penn’s (2011, p. 212) assertion that “policy decisions that are shaped by an unacknowledged past go on to shape standards and guidelines in the present”. Drawing together Bennett’s statement and Penn’s assertion, this thesis brings multiple constructions of quality and the discourses that shaped them to the fore.

In the current Australian ECEC policy context, tensions about the purpose of quality in ECEC prevail. By examining how these tensions are connected to past policy rationales the thesis provides a historical mapping of how and why multiple constructions of quality have developed in certain ways. It generates deep understandings about the fragility of quality in present-day times and provides opportunities for policy learning about fostering multiple constructions of quality in future ECEC policy.

Legislation

Child Care Act (1972) (Cth)

Education and Care Services Act (2010) (Cth)

Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (Cth)
References


Appendices
Appendix 1: The time periods described in the Australian political context section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Key events</th>
<th>Relationship to quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972 – 1983</td>
<td>The Child Care Act (1972)</td>
<td>Quality is linked to funding the establishment of non-profit long day care centres and the employment of qualified staff in these centres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Accord (1983)</td>
<td>Child care considered part of the social wage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984 – 1993</td>
<td>Section 11 of Child Care Act – repealed (1985)</td>
<td>Link between subsidies and qualified staff is removed leading to fears of an erosion of quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commonwealth government calls for a system of accreditation (1990)</td>
<td>Government policy emphasises the provision of child care places through the privatisation of the child care sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government funding available to private sector (January, 1991)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishment of INAC (end of 1991) and subsequently NCAC (July, 1993)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Operational subsidies removed from non-profit long day care centres (1997)</td>
<td>Removal of operational subsidies from non-profit long day care centres renders these centres less able to afford qualified staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OECD Background report for Australia (2000)</td>
<td>Calls for a national focus to address the provision of good quality child care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Event/Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rapid expansion of corporate long day care</td>
<td>Calls for increased numbers of qualified staff and ways to ensure and improve quality regardless of service auspice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Invitation to participate in the study

Dear

I am writing to invite you to participate in a doctoral study investigating the emergence of quality in policy for centre-based long day care in Australia between 1972 and 2009. Given your expert knowledge and deep insights into early childhood issues across the time period indicated above, your input into the study would be extremely valuable. Attached is a participant information form outlining details of the project. Participation in this research would involve an interview (approximately 1 hour in length) at a time and place convenient to you. I plan to conduct interviews throughout April, May and June, 2011. Should you decide to participate in the study, I would forward an outline of the interview questions to you prior to the interview. Research findings published in journal articles will be made available to participants.

I am the sole researcher in this study under the supervision of Professor Jennifer Sumson and Dr Frances Press, at Charles Sturt University. For further information or to decline or accept this invitation to participate, please contact me:
Phone: 0419 974 615 (M)
0260 519422 (W)
Email: hlogan@csu.edu.au
Alternatively, I will contact you within 2 weeks of sending this letter to establish your interest in this research.

Kind regards

Helen Logan

Helen Logan
Lecturer/PhD Student
Murray School of Education
Charles Sturt University
PO Box 789
Albury NSW 2640
Ph: 0260 519422
Fax: 0260 519424
Email: hlogan@csu.edu.au
Appendix 3: Participant information form

Participant information form
Constructions of ‘quality’ within Australian government policy concerning centre-based long day care between 1972 and 2009.

This doctoral research project within the Faculty of Education, Charles Sturt University, involves investigating the emergence of quality in policy for Australian centre-based long day care between 1972 and 2009.

Primary/Sole Researcher: Helen Logan
Contact Email: hlogan@csu.edu.au
Department Affiliations: Faculty of Education, Charles Sturt University
Contact phone no’s: 0419 974 615 (M) 0260 519 422 (W)

Why have you been approached?
Many policy documents detail decisions and directions about Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), yet there are few accounts from participants who were involved in policy making circles across the time period 1972 to 2009. This research presents a unique opportunity to contribute information to the ECEC field that may otherwise be lost over time. Your knowledge of and insights into early childhood issues across this time period is of interest to this project. Being a participant is voluntary and does not receive any monetary payment or other form of reward for participating in the research.

What is involved for you: The research involves participation in one interview with the researcher (or more if you so desire) at a time and place convenient to you. The duration of the interview is anticipated to be approximately one hour.

Recording the data: Interviews will be recorded using an MP3 recording device. If you do not consent to the use of the recording device, the interview will be recorded with handwritten notes.

Confidentiality: The researcher intends to preserve anonymity and confidentiality for each participant, unless otherwise requested by the participant. However, it is recognised that due to the small size of early childhood circles, anonymity may be difficult to achieve. For this reason transcripts of each interview will be returned to the interviewee for the opportunity to screen their own data before it is released. Pseudonyms will be used in resulting publications to protect participant identities.
**Dissemination of results:** If requested, publications resulting from the project will be forwarded to participants.

**Withdrawal from the project:** Participants wishing to withdraw from the research at any time before, during or after the research has been completed can do so without penalty. There is no obligation to stay as a participant in the research and no obligation to give a reason for withdrawal from the project. The researcher does not anticipate or intend that the research will involve any discomfort or risk to participants. This project has been approved by Charles Sturt University’s Ethics in Human Research Committee. If you have any complaints or concerns about this research please contact:

**Executive Officer**

**Ethics in Human Research Committee**
**Academic Secretariat**
**Charles Sturt University**
**Private Mail Bag 29**
**Bathurst NSW 2795**
**Phone: (02) 6338 4628**
**Fax: (02) 6338 4194**
Appendix 4: Participant consent form

Participant consent form

Constructions of ‘quality’ within Australian government policy concerning centre-based long day care between 1972 and 2009.

As part of my doctoral research with Charles Sturt University, I am undertaking a project to investigating the emergence of quality in policy for Australian centre-based long day care between 1972 and 2009.

Primary/Sole Researcher: Helen Logan
Contact Email: hlogan@csu.edu.au
Department Affiliations: Faculty of Education, Charles Sturt University
Contact phone no: 0260 519422 (W) 0419 974 615 (M)

This research is being conducted to meet the requirements of a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of:

Supervisor: Professor Jennifer Sumision
Department: Faculty of Education
Affiliations: Charles Sturt University
Contact phone: 0263 384 423
Contact email: jsumision@csu.edu.au

Co-supervisor: Dr Frances Press
Department: Faculty of Education
Affiliations: Charles Sturt University
Contact phone: 0263 384 287
Contact email: fpress@csu.edu.au

Before signing this form, please tick the following boxes if the statements are true:

☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation in the research at any time and that if I do I will not be subjected to any penalty or discriminatory treatment

☐ The purpose of the research has been explained to me and I have read and understood the information sheet given to me

☐ I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and received satisfactory answers to any questions I have asked

☐ I understand that any information or personal details gathered in the course of this research about me are confidential and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be used or published without my written permission

☐ I understand that the interviews will be audio taped unless I request otherwise where the researcher will not audio tape the interview.
Charles Sturt University’s Ethics in Human Research Committee has approved this study. I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact:

**Executive Officer**  
Private Mail Bag 29  
Ethics in Human Research Committee  
Bathurst NSW 2795  
**Academic Secretariat**  
Phone: 0263 384 628  
**Charles Sturt University**  
Fax: 0263 384 194

I have read and understood the Information Sheet and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

**Participant’s Signature:**

**Date:**

**Investigator’s Signature:**

**Date:**
Appendix 5: Information sheet for organisations

Information sheet

Constructions of ‘quality’ within Australian government policy concerning centre-based long day care between 1972 and 2009.

This doctoral research within the Faculty of Education, Charles Sturt University, involves investigating the emergence of ‘quality’ in government policy for Australian centre-based long day care between 1972 and 2009.

Researcher: Helen Logan
Contact Email: hlogan@csu.edu.au
Department Affiliations: Faculty of Education, Charles Sturt University
Contact phone no’s: 0419 974 615 (M) 0263 386676 (W)

Why have you been approached?
There are few accounts of constructions of quality in policy making circles across the time period 1972 to 2009. Your organisations involvement in early childhood issues across this time period is of interest to this project. This research presents a unique opportunity to contribute information to the ECEC field that may otherwise be lost over time.

What is involved for you: I would visit your organisation at a date and time convenient to you. The duration of the visit is anticipated to take several hours. If authorised, copies of policy documents may be made at a cost borne by me.

Confidentiality: In working with these documents, I will operate from the assumption that most submissions and position statements will be reflective of the organisation’s public policy positions of the time and will not need to be de-identified. However, if requested, I will de-identify your organisation in the research project and any subsequent publications.

Withdrawal from the project: Organisations wishing to withdraw from the research at any time before, during or after the research has been completed can do so without penalty. There is no obligation to give a reason for withdrawal from the project. I do not anticipate or intend that the research will involve any risk to your organisation.
This project has been approved by Charles Sturt University’s Ethics in Human Research Committee. If you have any complaints or concerns about this research please contact:

Executive Officer
Ethics in Human Research Committee
Academic Secretariat
Charles Sturt University
Private Mail Bag 29
Bathurst NSW 2795
Phone: (02) 6338 4628
Fax: (02) 6338 4194
Appendix 6: Interview questions

The interviewer commences with an explanation of the time period of interest, between 1972 and 2009 with particular reference to times the participant was active in policy making circles.

1. Can we begin by discussing your involvement in issues pertaining to early childhood education in Australia (particularly long day care)?
2. Your involvement for over 30 years as XXXX for early childhood education has clearly been important in influencing quality in early childhood policy. Why do you consider quality is important for the ECEC sector?
3. Your role as XXXX was during a significant period for Australia’s interest in child care. What can you tell me about your involvement in child care policy during this period? What were the key considerations driving policy agenda?
4. Quality is currently a key component of the COAG reform agenda, what do you consider to be influences on the rise of quality for the ECEC sector (particularly long day care)?
5. Do you think the concept of quality emerged to address a particular problem? If so, what was that problem?
6. Do you understand quality differently now than say …20 years ago? … Do you consider your ideas of quality are constructed differently in varying contexts?
7. The term ‘quality’ is widely used and means different things to different people so I’m wondering if you could tell me what quality in ECEC means to you?
8. Are there particular values and beliefs that underpin your understandings of quality?
9. Do you consider there are other prominent or influential ways of thinking (discourses) that have influenced understandings of quality? If so, what are they?
10. From your experiences and understanding of this time period [1972 – 2009], is there anything else you’d like to touch on about quality that you think is important to discuss?

END
Other questions to elicit more information could be added such as:
Can you tell me more about what you mean by that? And
Can you talk me through the last time a situation like that affected your decisions about quality?
What happened then?
So what did that mean for your practice/organisation?
Appendix 7: Preliminary mapping document
## Appendix 7: preliminary mapping document

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key dates/developments</th>
<th>Preliminary comments/ description of events</th>
<th>Implications for quality</th>
<th>Follow-up comments and key documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child care Act 1972 (Cth) [the Act]</strong></td>
<td>The Act enabled the Commonwealth government to make capital and recurrent grants to non-profit organizations (Wangmann, 1995). This Act was the first piece of Commonwealth Government legislation passed for child care. The Act was passed by the McMahon government and received Royal Assent shortly before an electoral defeat by the Whitlam government in December 1972. The Act reflects a growing recognition by the Commonwealth government that there were increased numbers of women in the workforce and very little government funded child care provision for their children. The Act also reflects recognition that without government support most parents could not afford lacked the quality required for children's welfare.</td>
<td>The Act reflects recognition from the Commonwealth government that parents could not access employment options without government support for child care. In doing so, the government recognises some responsibility for child care provision. Commonwealth subsidies provide 75% of award wages for qualified staff, teachers and nurses.</td>
<td>Well publicly funded child care – is a feature of the community model proposed in the Act and shortly after in the report of the Australian Social Welfare Commission. (1974).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Accord - 1983</td>
<td>“Child care was defined as an important part of the social wage” (Brennan 1998, p.164) – that is a recognised part of government spending to supplement paid income.</td>
<td>A move from child care being viewed primarily as a women’s issue to an issue of economic necessity – people need access to funded care services in order to earn an income and increase the productivity of the Australian workforce. While the quality of child care is not specifically discussed the importance of child care overall is recognised.</td>
<td>The Accord 1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1985</td>
<td>Commonwealth government announces new funding arrangements for child care – a feature of the new funding system ended the link between subsidies and award wages in – “Previously under section 11 of the Child Care Act, centres had received 75 per cent of the award wages of the nurses and teachers they employed. The number of staff in each of these categories for whom subsidy was received depended upon the number and ages of children attending the centre. This system meant that staff could be paid award wages and that</td>
<td>Quality service provision is linked largely to qualified staff, in particular university qualified staff. By changing funding arrangements commonwealth funded services were unable to afford qualified staff. This led to the erosion of qualified staff in services and was huge factor leading to the erosion of overall quality.</td>
<td>A key change here – follow-up what government documents are available to justify this decision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
centres would not suffer a financial penalty if they employed well qualified, experienced staff" (Brennan 1998, p.184). The government repealed section 11 of the *Child Care Act 1972* which required all Commonwealth funded centres to employ some trained staff. This policy decision led to the erosion of the employment of qualified staff in child care centres. (Brennan, 1998). It also appears to have implications for the government’s agenda about what was important for young children and families – the emphasis was on the provision of additional services with less consideration for the quality of the service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Reference/Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Newspaper comments in the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) from Peter Walsh, then Minister for Finance, suggests the establishment of new child care centre should be left to the private sector. Walsh, David Clark and John Hyde oppose publicly funded child care actively in the SMH and Financial Review – refer to Brennan (1998, p. 192 – 193) – a clear leaning here toward the private sector.</td>
<td>The Commonwealth government, particularly then Minister for Finance, Peter Walsh, views new child care services as the responsibility of the private sector – a very different view than the view than developments shortly after the implementation of the <em>Child Care Act 1972</em>. Refer to articles referred to here in the SMH and Financial review (1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Discussion paper – Government spending on work-related child care: Some economic issues (<em>Anstie</em>, Gregory, Dowrick &amp; Pincus, 1988). This paper argued that publicly funded child care had major social and economic benefits to society as a whole (Brennan 1998, p. 197). They argued that public investment in child care was a societal issue not just a women’s issue and contributed to social equity and income distribution as the recipients were mainly low and middle income families. This was particularly interesting as the report was produced by mainstream economists at a time when economic constraints were paramount. Dr Neil Blewett supported the paper but most of his cabinet did not (Brennan 1998, p.199). This is a really interesting time – here is an example of a report recommending publicly funded child care and only three years later</td>
<td>A report by economists supporting public funded child care and suggesting there were social and economic gains for society as well as individuals. Considers the dissipation of skills and experience that occurs from ‘female labour force withdrawal’ (<em>Anstie</em> et al., 1988, p.16). Discusses retention of skilled labour through women’s workforce participation and the ensuing benefits to society. Search for archived policy documents, parliamentary speeches, decisions discussing this report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the government extends Commonwealth funding to the for-profit sector – Why? Re-read this report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 1989</td>
<td>Children’s services program national advisory committee established.</td>
<td>Check the role of this committee any potential connections for understandings of quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Hawke policy speech (1990)</td>
<td>Decision to extend government Childcare Assistance to for-profit sector and announces the development of an Australian accreditation system if elected. Appears to reflect an important change in government policy that has implications for quality in child care – obtain a copy of the speech and subsequent related documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1991</td>
<td>There appeared to be concern that government money was going to the for-profit sector and some influential people – politicians, policy writers, academics, NACBCS and ECA etc… were not convinced that children were receiving the excellence of ECEC they needed. Larger numbers of Australian children were spending an increased proportion of their early life in child care.</td>
<td>Expansion of the for-profit sector – a dramatic shift from the community sector to the for-profit sector. A recognition that regulations were not enough to ensure quality – other terms used for quality may have been used include ‘excellence’ &amp; ‘best practice’ Refer to Wangmann 1995, p.23. Read through ECA minutes, CCCC minutes, NACBCS minutes and archival material etc… for additional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>June Wangmann commissioned to provide a report about the possibilities of introducing an accreditation system by the Commonwealth government – appears to be the first recognition by Commonwealth Government that regulations were not sufficient to ensure children were getting quality service provision. The government is interested in a mechanism for quality assurance. Election campaigns by both Labor and Coalition Governments espoused child care as central to their social and economic goals – economic and labour force policies appear to drive policy.</td>
<td>A mechanism for ‘assuring quality’ raises lots of issues here about quality – first, that it can be measured and accounted for and second, that this would be a national system. While there were many concerns driving the development of an accreditation system there also appear to be limitations. Child care quality is linked to political campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Between 1993 and 2002 the numbers of children in formal childcare settings increased by 39% (Press &amp; Woodrow, 2005).</td>
<td>Inequitable access to quality appears to exist and appears linked to the cost of child care – possible investigation of thick and thin markets and what appears to be a simplistic view of markets here by Commonwealth Government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Establishment of the National Accreditation Council chaired by Quentin Bryce.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Economic Planning and Advisory Committee (EPAC) – established August 30, 1995. This committee is commissioned under a Labor government “to investigate and report on the prospective demand for child care, best practice in the provision for child care and the links between the provision of child care and other children’s and family services” (ECPAC 1996b, p.129). According to Brennan (1998) the intention of the report is in relation to equity issues but the proposed model, restricts access to good quality formal child care services to those who can afford the difference between the Child Care Benefit and the fees. The report describes parents as consumers and encourages choice.</td>
<td>The effect of this policy and the removal of operational subsidies (see below) is described as a “level playing field” strategy. This appears to be a different understanding of how quality is constructed within ECEC services. Reduced government funding forces services to higher cheaper labour – Government lets market decide and assumes quality will be assured through QIAS and regulations but research in the ensuing ten years suggests child care is a complex market and non-profit services have an advantage in producing quality care (Cleveland &amp; Krashinsky, 2005). What assumptions underlie the provision of child care in a ‘free’ market? Is this a ‘truth’ that the market can decide?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Removal of operational subsidies to community based long day care centres (described as a level playing field strategy). This policy change appears to provide an incentive to hire younger, unqualified staff in order to keep operational costs low. Child care is viewed as a homogenous market, but are child care markets homogenous if they have particular aspects that do not fit with traditional markets?</td>
<td>What are the implications of these assumptions for quality? The emphasis on decisions about choosing quality in child care falls back to the family but what bearing might this have on constructions of quality in child care? Could this be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event/Report</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>OECD Thematic review of early childhood education and care policy: Australian background report.</td>
<td>The report notes policy change over a decade from a reliance on non-profit sector to for-profit sector. In addition a move from a supply-led model of funding to a demand-led model of funding. Challenges for quality are connected to uneven service provision and regulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>ABC Learning Centres becomes the first publicly listed child care company in Australia.</td>
<td>A company structure enables ‘economies of scale’ and enables ABC to takeover small private entities and community based services. Through the use of the market as an economic tool they are able to expand their business model and drive many operators out of business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report (OECD, 2006) notes Australia is ranked as one of the lowest providers of ECEC in the developed world – 1/5th of OECD average ‘bottom of the ladder’ of developed nations. Two key national reports: Press (2006) and Elliott (2006) add to what appears to be a growing government concern about the way Australia cares for its young children. Within this broader concern</td>
<td>Quality continues to be affected by the tensions between profitability and the employment of qualified staff. Quality appears uneven across Australia – possibly due to ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ markets. Competition appears to have an uneasy connection with quality as competition in markets traditionally drive the price</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
about ECEC are particular concerns about quality in child care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Rudd Labor government elected after 11 years of Howard Coalition Government.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 - 2009</td>
<td>ABC Learning Centres goes into receivership and the Commonwealth government allocates funding to assist services to continue to operate. Report from Expert Advisory Panel (EAP) toward a national quality framework for early childhood education and care.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"The Strategy proposes six priority areas for reform to be further developed for COAG in 2010, recognising the different starting points of states and territories and as resources allow:

- Strengthen universal maternal, child and family health services
- Support for vulnerable children
- Engaging parents and the community in understanding the importance of ECD
- Improve early childhood infrastructure
- Strengthen the workforce across ECD and family support services, and

Discusses the need for change. It outlines a vision a national quality framework including key drivers of quality in early childhood education and care. 15 hours preschool provision notes a commitment to funding to children in the birth to five sector – but funding that goes to children alone will increase access but will it improve quality?

An integrated approach to quality through licensing, regulation and accreditation – outlines 7 aspects of quality

A national quality agenda forms part of the National Early Childhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elliott, (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG (2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Build better information and a solid evidence base.”

Endorsement of the Early Years Learning Framework

National Quality Agenda - a need for consistent quality standards across jurisdictions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Strategy. The quality agenda includes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Quality Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality Rating System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Streamlined Regulatory Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Early Years Learning Framework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several key themes – an integrated approach to service delivery
An integrated approach to licensing, regulations and accreditation.
The employment of more qualified staff in child care and national standards for consistent quality.
Quality appears to be a focus of government policy for ECEC overall and for the Strategy.
Appendix 8: Corpus of policy documents informing the study

Legislation

*Child Care Act (1972)* (Cth).

*Child Care Amendment Act (1985)*, no.158. (Cth).


**Official government policy documents**


**Advocacy documents**


Australian Council of Trade Unions. (1989, September). *Response to the background paper on funding options for child care and their relations to social justice by*


Kindergarten Union Children’s Services. (2009). Submission into the senate education, employment and workplace relations committee inquiry into the provision of child care. Submission 32.


Documents representative of influential organisations

Each edition of:

- *Every Child* 1994 (1st edition) - 2009 were read for articles related to the research questions. A total of 63 editions of *Every Child* magazine were reviewed for the study.
- *Rattler* 1987 – 2009 were read for articles related to the research questions. A total of 89 editions of *Rattler* magazine were reviewed for the study.

Transcripts of interviews with policy elite informants

- 13 transcripts of in-depth individual interviews with 13 elite informants active in policy making circles between 1972 and 2009.
Appendix 9: Mapping interview questions to the research questions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims of the study</th>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Interview question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| i. Critically examine constructions of quality in Australian centre-based long day care between 1972 and 2009. | 1. How has quality been constructed in government policy concerning centre-based long day care in Australia between 1972 and 2009? | Int.1. Can we begin by outlining your involvement in issues pertaining to early childhood education and care in Australia (particularly long day care)?

Int.2. Your involvement for over 30 years as XXXX for early childhood education and care has clearly been important in influencing quality in early childhood policy. Why do you consider quality is important for the ECEC sector?

Int.3. Your role as XXXX was during a significant period for Australia's interest in child care. What can you tell me about your involvement in child care policy during this period? What were the key considerations driving policy agenda? |
| ii. Highlight discourses underpinning constructions of quality. | 2. How have constructions of quality been produced through discourses? Why? | Int.4. Quality is currently a key component of the COAG reform agenda, what do you consider to be influences on the rise of quality for the ECEC sector (particularly long day care)?

Int.6. Do you understand quality differently now than say ...20 years ago? ... Do you consider your ideas of quality are constructed differently in varying contexts?

Int.7. The term 'quality' is used widely and means different things to different people so I’m wondering if you could tell me what quality means to you?

Int.8 Are there particular values and beliefs that underpin your understandings of quality?

| iii. Identify how policymaking processes and events in the recent past have shaped understandings of quality. | 3. Which discourses of quality are prevalent in key policy documents in Australian ECEC from 1972 until 2009? Why? | Int.5. Do you think the concept of quality emerged to address a particular problem? If so, what was that problem?

Int.9 Do you consider there are other prominent or influential ways of thinking (discourses) that have influenced understandings of quality? If so, what are they?

Int.10. From your experiences and understanding of this time period [1972-2009] is there anything else you’d like to touch on about quality that you think is important to discuss? |
Appendix 10: Preliminary coding of interview transcripts in NVIVO
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Created On</th>
<th>Created By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>HL</td>
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<td>Children's welfare</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<tr>
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<td>37</td>
<td>20/05/2011 1:36 PM</td>
<td>HL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy context for the introduction of accreditation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional practice expertise and discourse</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Economic research</td>
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<td>Reductionist discourses</td>
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<td>Supply</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theoretical perspectives</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>12/08/2011 3:37 PM</td>
<td>HL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 11: Steps in processes of data analysis

The following steps represent 1-3 represent the linear analytical processes adopted in my data analysis. Steps 4 – 7 represent the iterative processes involved in my data analysis (see examples on pp. 221 – 223).

**Step 1:**

I immersed myself in the data through repeated readings of the documents and interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I read the policy documents and highlighted every mention of the term quality (yellow highlighter). These mentions were then counted and recorded in a separate word file (in data analysis folder). NVIVO was used to initially organise, manage and code the interview transcripts (see p. 216).

**Step 2:**

I organised the data into meaningful groups by highlighting the text surrounding references to the context in which the term quality or debates about historical &/or contemporary references to quality were mentioned (green highlighter). For example, where a policy document referred to the need for an increased supply of trained preschool teachers for improving quality, this section of text was highlighted (see also p. 221).

**Step 3:**

I transcribed the green highlighted sections of text (data) whether they were phrases, sentences or paragraphs that represented multiple views of quality and entered these into a table (see p. 222 – 223).
Step 4:

I copied the green highlighted sections of text (data) to a table and began to analyse the extracts from the text initially under the following headings:

Excerpts from text

Preliminary thoughts

Preliminary sub-themes

As I immersed myself more deeply in the analysis I revised my headings as:

Excerpts from the text

Summary interpretations

Possible thoughts and questions

Initial thinking for considerations for analysis

Possible questions and extracts related to the interview data

Potential links to other data

Sub-themes

Any links to the interview transcripts were recorded in ‘possible links to other data’. I worked my way across the table, backwards and forwards and forwards and backwards across the interview transcripts. The list of sub-themes represents how I labelled sections of data which categorise and summarise accounts for each piece of data in relation to the research question/s. For example, where quality was mentioned as suitable for children’s developmental needs, a sub-theme of ‘developmental needs’ was assigned; where quality was constructed as costly for parents the sub-theme of ‘cost’ was assigned. Some sub-themes were not as discrete as others but were extrapolated from the data (see also p. 222 – 223).
**Step 5:**

I counted the frequency of mentions for each sub-theme, although the number of mentions was not necessarily important. The sub-themes were modified as additional data items generated new and deeper insights. I highlighted questions and comments across the data analysis table for follow-up under the title: ‘Specific implications for further discussion in the article’ (see p. 222 – 223).

**Step 6:**

As multiple sub-themes were generated across many data items, I clustered them into common themes within and across the data set. This involved repeated readings of the transcripts and policy documents and identifying patterns across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006), (see also p.224 – 226).

**Step 7:**

This stage involved applying a ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach (Bacchi, 2009). A WPR approach is consistent with Foucault’s idea of discourses that “form a practice which is articulated upon the other practices (Foucault, 1991 as cited in Bacchi, 2009, p.35). It is the relationship between discourses and power that is particularly interesting. Foucault (1978, p.100) notes, “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable.” I applied Bacchi’s six questions to the data (Bacchi, 2009, 2), (see p. 227). This stage required examining the way problem representations of quality are potentially ‘nested’ or ‘embedded within each other’ (Bacchi, 2009, p.21). For example, the problem of ‘quality’ was ‘nested’ within other problem representations such as women’s workforce participation and cost. I also kept a file titled ‘issues contributing
to debates about quality’ in my data analysis folder. This folder contained highlighted text that appeared to contribute to debates about quality even if the text did not mention the term quality or imply the term quality. For example, text relating to an overriding concern for children’s welfare in the House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972 Second Reading Speech (Cth) was mentioned on four occasions although only two of these were in direct reference to the term quality.
Steps 1 – 2: Example of data analysis

The Bill gives effect to the announcement by the Treasurer (Mr Sneddon) in his Budget Speech on 15th August last of the Government’s intention to bring down legislation concerning child care centres. This Government initiative is a tangible expression of its very real and proper concern for the welfare of children. It is designed as a humanitarian measure with particular concern being directed to those in need.

The purpose of the legislation is to ensure the development of child care facilities of good quality throughout the Commonwealth. Included in the concept of good quality are both the physical arrangements and the professional staffing in the provision of which the overriding consideration will be the emotional, intellectual and physical development of children in child care centres.

This legislation expresses the Government’s recognition of the rapidly increasing proportion of married women in the labour force and of the consequences of this phenomenon for the care of their children. Since 1961 the proportion of married women in the labour force has increased from 17 per cent to over 35 per cent. It is evident that, for a wide variety of reasons, an increasing number of married women are choosing to remain in or return to paid employment. They include mothers with young families. It is known that at the present time over 25 per cent of mothers with children under the age of five are in the labour force. Some of these mothers are engaged in paid employment in their own homes and care for their children at the same time. But there are over 150,000 preschool aged children whose mothers, or single fathers, work outside their homes.

Consistent with these developments the Government some time ago established a special section within my Department - the Women’s Bureau - to examine problems relating to the employment of women. Its work has included an investigation relating to needs in child care, particularly the needs of working mothers. Its studies covered developments in the field of child day care in most other industrialised countries. Further research programmes initiated in my Department and elsewhere subsequently indicated the parameters of the problem of child day care. Most importantly, they revealed that child care facilities had not kept pace with the rapid growth in the female labour force during the 1960s and that, as a consequence, existing child care facilities were inadequate, quantitatively and qualitatively, for the growing numbers of children needing them. Not only were there too few centres but to many cases the provision was only for children attending and not for the quality of care appropriate to the educational, emotional and developmental needs of the young children involved.

Having studied the nature of the problem, the Government established a committee of officers to report on the action required for its solution. The committee examined the dimensions of the problem, the range of possible remedial actions, and various approaches to financing. During this examination the committee held the benefit of consultations with State government departments and with representatives from a wide range of local government, professional and voluntary groups and organisations throughout Australia concerned with day care arrangements for children. These consultations revealed, among other things, that child care which was beneficial to the child’s overall development was prohibitively costly for the large body of parents, and secondly, that the child care arrangements that most parents could afford fell far short of the quality that was required in the interests of child welfare. While many working mothers were able to make satisfactory arrangements for their children during working hours, a substantial number were not, partly because of a shortage of child care facilities and partly because of the cost. It became evident that only through Government action could the problems that had developed in relation to child care be met within an appropriate time scale.

In summary, the Government decided that action was urgently needed to ensure sufficient good quality child care facilities in the community for the proper care and development of pre-school aged children whose parents or guardians are unable, for a variety of reasons, to make other suitable arrangements. These facilities should be available at a cost that is not prohibitive to parents, especially to parents of children in special need. The latter include one-parent families, newly-arrived migrants, low-income groups generally and families where one of the parents is sick or incapacitated.

CHAMBER
### Steps 3 – 5: Example of data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract from text</th>
<th>Summary interpretations</th>
<th>Possible thoughts and questions</th>
<th>Initial thinking for considerations for analysis</th>
<th>Possible questions and extracts related to the interview data</th>
<th>Potential links to other data</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| House of Reps Child Care Bill, 1972, Second reading speech | The purpose of the legislation is to ensure the development of child day care facilities of good quality throughout the Commonwealth. Included in the concept of good quality are both the physical arrangements and the professional staffing, in the provision of which the overriding consideration will be the emotional, intellectual and physical development of children in child care centres. | Quality is to be provided through the development of day care facilities. Quality is juxtaposed with good, implying it is subject to variation. Good quality is considered, in part, as the provision of physical arrangements and professional staff. The key reason for providing quality noted here is for children's emotional, intellectual and physical. | Why is quality highlighted in these ways? – through physical arrangements and qualified staff? Why was there a focus on quality in terms of physical arrangements and qualified staff at that point in time? What differences in thinking/discourses have occurred since then? Did this lead to a construction of quality primarily from developmental perspectives? If so | The focus on staffing and physical environment at this time may have been the educators' view of quality that informed the Act – a possible point for investigation. See comments from Joyce and Emma on what groups influenced the content of the Act? Was there a philanthropic genesis for this Bill? Why? If so, in what way might a philanthropic genesis influence concepts of quality? Why does the thinking about quality that informed the Act rest predominantly from a developmental perspective? | Comments from Joyce “the Bill was designed on the advice of the titled Lady, whose name eludes me, who was the President of the... Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland. All these places were run by titled ladies... that's another thing, you know there was Lady Vincent Fairfax in Sydney and Lady so and so in... What was the influence of the titled ladies? Comments from Emma [p.13]: “we don’t have those wealthy philanthropic women in early childhood anymore... they’re all dying and as far as I can see they’re not being replaced and so there was something and I don’t know whether this fits in with what you’re thinking in relation to quality, but there was something about the power and influence of those women whose influence let’s face it often came from their husbands’ money but who had tremendous influence and who could ring up the Prime Minister or have dinner with the Minister for Children’s Services...” socity because they were friends or whatever and whose hearts and heads were in the right place about quality and who respected people within the profession... and somehow that allowed us to have a kind of purer or higher vision I guess and I think you do lose some of that when you get into the political mainstream. I mean even if some of those women are still around there’s more wheeling and dealing and ego and flows and swings and roundabouts and all of that by being in the mainstream so I think that is something if I was stopping way back and thinking about what has happened to quality between 1972 and 2009 somehow... as policy... somehow that needs to be | Links to Brennan (1998, p.68) 
Links to Standards and General Principles Recommended By The Australian Pre-school Association Booklet 11 (1970). | Developmental needs 
Philanthropy 
Physical environment 
Qualified staff |
| Development. There is no mention of social development for children here. |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| What is privileged or made possible? | Why is social development not mentioned? Are there other aspects of development that could be considered? |
| Other comments by participants relate to their emphasis on the importance of understanding child development (from a developmental perspective) – see Barbara, Emma, Rebecca and Laura. |
| Taken into account because it was a very different way of working... it was social connections and um... well that's what it was; it was social connections, not political connections."

Note to self: Coded as Professional practice, expertise and discourse in the interviews in Novo - may consider collapsing with code of developmental needs from policy documents.

Barbara [p. 19, 20],
Emma [p. 5, 6, 7, 8, 12],
Rebecca [p. 5],
Laura [p. 7, 11, 12, 17, 18].

Comments from Barbara [p. 1]"I got involved originally with ECA as an advocate, again because I knew Lady Fairfax... like you, you sort of roll into things without necessarily conscious decisions."

In what ways might the influence of social connections have led to different constructions of quality? Is the political connection a particular lens for considering quality that somehow misses the messy complexities of quality?

- Laura: "I'd always had this interest in policy and I was a member of all the advisory committees... and one of my main interests was, as you'll see when you go through some of the papers, [Laura refers here to documents, minutes of meetings and previous reports] has been to put quality on that agenda in policy..."

"What we've actually been able to achieve since 1972 to a certain extent hasn't been gigantic because there've been some key things... um... and you know... the rhetoric that the politicians use certainly hasn't matched the reality."

Specific implications for further discussion in the article:

- A focus on children's development, qualified staff and physical arrangements for quality – what ideology underpinned thinking existed at this time with this focus?
- The seeds of an emphasis on the importance of quality in child care moving into the political mainstream.
Step 6: Example of data analysis

Themes (upper case) and sub-themes (lower case) from data analysis informing Article Three
Step 6: Example of data analysis

Themes (upper case) and sub-themes (lower case) from data analysis informing Article Four

**Note:** Yellow text highlights the emergence of new themes (upper case) and sub-themes (lower case) since Article Three
Step 6: Example of data analysis

Themes (upper case) and sub-themes (lower case) from data analysis informing Article Five

Note: Red text highlights the emergence of new themes (Upper case) and sub-themes (lower case) since Article Four
Step 7: Example of Bacchi’s questions applied to data

What’s the problem represented to be (WPR)? An approach to policy analysis (Bacchi, 2009).

1. What’s the problem represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?
3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?
6. How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

The application of these six key questions in a WPR approach engages in a form of discourse analysis as it identifies and interrogates the key themes identified in the thematic analysis of the selected policy texts and extracts from interview transcripts. Stepping back from the minutiae of coding and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and applying these questions more broadly identifies categories, key concepts and binaries operating within policy (Bacchi, 2009).
Example of applying Bacchi’s questions for the data analysis informing Article Three

Note: All text in italics in the Analytical processes column is from the House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972 Second Reading Speech. (Cth).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bacchi’s (2009) questions</th>
<th>Analytical processes</th>
<th>Links to discourses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What’s the problem represented to be in a specific policy?</td>
<td><strong>The purpose of the legislation is to ensure the development of child day care facilities of good quality throughout the Commonwealth. Included in the concept ‘good quality’ are both the physical arrangements and the professional staffing, in the provision of which the overriding consideration will be the emotional, intellectual and physical development of children in child care centres, (p. 2288)… Not only were there too few centres but in many cases the provision was only for child minding and not for the quality of child care appropriate to the educational, emotional and developmental needs of the young children involved, (p. 2288).</strong> The problem of quality is represented as poor quality (or non-existent quality). It is represented as lacking at that time (1972) but necessary for children’s development. Quality is closely associated with child care facilities and staffing. …the childminding arrangements that most parents could afford fell far short of the quality that was required in the interests of child welfare. While many working mothers were able to make satisfactory arrangements for their children during working hours, a substantial number were not, partly because of a shortage of child care facilities and partly because of the cost, (p. 2289). The problem of quality is also closely associated with increasing labour force participation rates of women (primarily mothers of young children) in the workforce, welfare concerns for children, supply and cost of child care. Further, quality is represented as a solution to improved experiences for children’s welfare. Quality is closely connected to issues of access to child care. Inability to access quality denies [my emphasis] children of opportunities for their development. <strong>The Government decided that action was urgently needed; action to ensure sufficient good quality child care facilities in the community… (p. 2289).</strong> A community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An oriented approach is proposed as a solution to a lack of quality child care. It is important to acknowledge that this initiative comprehends assistance at 3 levels - that of the child, of the family, and of the community. The scheme is forward looking and includes provision to stimulate research into all factors relating to the needs of the community in relation to the care of children. Significant though the increase in physical accommodation is, of much greater importance is the provision for improving the quality of child care that will be available to the community in future years. Therefore, access to quality in child care is proposed through community-based child care provision to solve the problem of poor quality for children, parents’ workforce participation and the needs of local communities. The Government regards these grants as particularly significant because they should improve the quality of the care provided without causing the cost of the service to the parents to increase. The Bill moves the problem of poor or non-existent quality in child care from an individual problem to a Government responsibility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?</th>
<th>The presuppositions and assumptions that underlie the representation of the problem of quality are:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Identifying what is taken for granted | - the Bill provides for assistance to non-profit organisations, including local governing bodies, to establish and operate centres which provide day care for children of working and sick parents and which give priority of admission to children in special need. The presupposition that quality is primarily to support workforce participation (primarily mothers of young children) and sick parents but this overlooks the importance of quality for the children of parents in unpaid employment, for staff and for other early childhood services.  
  - (i) the purchase, erection, extension or alteration of buildings, including necessary fixtures, and land cost, for use as a child care centre; and (ii) the purchase and installation of equipment for use in child care centres. The presupposition that quality is to be delivered solely in centre-based long day care centres. These centres are to be government funded and community owned. Capital grants were made available to eligible non-profit organisations. While this appears a positive step forward it overlooks possibilities for |
other flexible child care options.

- *Where there are 15 or more children 3 years of age or over enrolled full-time, the grant will be in respect of one pre-school teacher,* (p. 2290).

An assumption that children over 3 years of age should have access to a program delivered by a qualified preschool teacher but children below the age of three years should have access to a program delivered by a qualified nurse – this creates a professional binary between education to be offered to older children and care to be offered to younger children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?</th>
<th>...an increasing number of married women are choosing to remain in or return to paid employment. They include mothers with young families, (p. 2288). The representation of the problem of quality, couched in terms of government provisioning as a solution for children’s care and women’s workforce participation, has come about first because of an acute lack of affordable, quality child care and second because of broad social, political and economic changes, particularly for women.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the competing problem representations?</td>
<td>Broadly speaking, these recurrent grants will be determined on the following basis. They will be based on a prescribed proportion of the salaries payable to qualified preschool teachers and nurses employed in centres – the two categories of professionally qualified staff regarded as necessary in centres providing good quality care ... Younger children under 3 years of age have other and more demanding needs. The basis of the recurrent grant in respect of staff is therefore different (p. 2291).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are the silences?</td>
<td>The ‘unproblematic’ silences are that children whose parents do not participate in paid employment do not need access to quality child care, thus these children’s opportunities to access quality child care are silenced; another silence is that children under the age of 3 years do not need access to a qualified teacher and program, thus these children’s educational needs are silenced. Debates about the need for qualified staff for children less than three years of age has risen regularly in previous decades and again recently in the implementation of new National Discursive effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?</td>
<td>The effects of the provision of quality child care through Commonwealth government funding is directed solely at child care services and not other services in the early childhood sector. This provision creates an unhelpful binary between care and education – discursive effects here – for the early childhood sector, early childhood teachers and children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What difficulties are created for different groups?</td>
<td>While Commonwealth funding for child care was welcomed at the time [1972] it produced a divide between child care and other early childhood services. This can lead to a fragmentation of service provision through different models of funding and differing employment conditions for staff that hold the same qualification. It could also be viewed as placing child care services in a position where they are seen as lacking quality compared to other early childhood services. The problem could be replaced if a range of flexible child care options were provided that attracted Commonwealth funding (that is, capital and recurrent grants). The problem could be disrupted if a discourse of children’s rights was emphasised.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Appendix 12: Example of analytical processes in applying Bacchi’s fifth question to the interview component of the study, as discussed in Part Six.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected question from Bacchi’s (2009) WPR approach</th>
<th>Analytical processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?</td>
<td>What are the effects of elite informant categories on how meanings of quality are constructed in ECEC policy? How do themes of ‘professional’, ‘contextual’ and ‘technical’ construct meanings of quality? Refer to themes identified in the thematic analysis (see, Part Six, Table 2). How do these themes [that construct meanings of quality] play out in the development of ECEC policy? The effects of this problem representation appear to be influenced by what can and can’t be said about meanings of quality by particular categories of elite informants. How is it possible that what is said becomes sayable? (Foucault, 1991, p. 59). How do these effects of what is sayable play out in the construction of meanings of quality by the various categories of elite informants? Are particular categories of elite informants more influential than others? If so, why? These categories appear to be influenced by power relations, struggles and discourses operating in policy making contexts. The effects of these categories appear to shift/alter how meanings of quality are constructed in policy making processes. These effects appear to limit complex meanings of quality that are available through what can be spoken and written about these meanings. Limits on what can be...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
thought and said about meanings of quality appear to close off some meanings of quality and favour others.

| Are there difficulties created for categories of elite informants by these effects? Do some meanings become more available in ECEC policy than others? How are shifting meanings of quality through ‘professional’ constructions represented in policy? How do particular meanings of quality shift when taken up as problem representations in ECEC policy? If so, in what ways do these problem representations potentially enable or diminish meanings of quality in ECEC policy? How are shifting meanings of quality taken up through ‘contextual’ constructions? Are there meanings of quality that are overlooked? Why? |

### References


Appendix 13: Guarding against the dangers of presentism

### Preliminary analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract from text: House of Representatives Child Care Bill, 1972, Second reading speech.</th>
<th>Preliminary thoughts</th>
<th>Preliminary sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of the legislation is to ensure the development of child day care facilities of good quality throughout the Commonwealth. Included in the concept of good quality are both the physical arrangements and the professional staffing, in the provision of which the overriding consideration will be the emotional, intellectual and physical development of children in child care centres.</td>
<td>Quality is to be provided through the development of day care facilities. Quality is conceptualised as good, implying it is subject to variation. Good quality is constructed as the provision of physical arrangements and professional staff. When quality is constructed in these ways, what is silenced? Does this silence broader concepts of quality – see Duignan, 2005 – or alternatively position quality largely as viewed from ‘outsider perspectives’ (policy production) and less so of ‘insider perspectives’ (educators &amp; children)? The key reason for providing quality noted here is for children’s emotional, intellectual and physical development. Does this lead to a construction of quality primarily as from developmental perspectives and if so what is silenced? No mention of social development for children here.</td>
<td>Developmental needs Physical environment Qualified staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Revised analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract from text</th>
<th>Summary interpretations</th>
<th>Possible thoughts and questions</th>
<th>Initial thinking for considerations for analysis</th>
<th>Possible questions and extracts related to the interview data</th>
<th>Possible links to other data</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of the legislation is to ensure the development of child day care facilities of good quality throughout the Commonwealth. Included in the concept of good quality are both physical arrangements and qualified staff.</td>
<td>Quality is to be provided through the development of day care facilities. Quality is juxtaposed with good, implying it is subject to variation.</td>
<td>Why is quality highlighted in these ways? – through physical arrangements and qualified staff? Why was the focus on quality in terms of qualified staff and physical arrangements at this time may have been the educators’ view of quality that informed the Act – a possible point for investigation.</td>
<td>The focus on staffing and physical environment at this time may have been the educators’ view of quality that informed the Act – a possible point for investigation.</td>
<td>Comments from Joyce &quot;the Bill was designed on the advice of the titled Lady, whose name eludes me, who was the President of the um...Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland. All these places were</td>
<td>Links to Brennan (1998, p.68) Links to Standards and General Principles Recommended by The Australian Pre-school Association</td>
<td>Developmental needs Philanthropy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the physical arrangements and the professional staffing, in the provision of which the overriding consideration will be the emotional, intellectual and physical development of children in child care centres.

variation. Good quality is considered, in part, as the provision of physical arrangements and professional staff.

The key reason for providing quality noted here is for children’s emotional, intellectual and physical development. There is no mention of social development for children here.

this point in time?

What differences in thinking / discourses have occurred since then?

Did this lead to a construction of quality primarily from developmental perspectives? If so what is privileged or made possible?

Why is social development not mentioned? Are there other aspects of development that could be considered?

See comments from Joyce and Emma who/what groups influenced the content of the Act?

Was there a philanthropic genesis for this Bill? Why? If so, in what way might a philanthropic genesis influence concepts of quality?

Why does the thinking about quality that informed the Act rest predominantly from a developmental perspective?

Other comments by participants relate to their emphasis on the importance of understanding child development (from a developmental perspective) – see Barbara, Emma, Rebecca and Laura

run by titled ladies...that’s another thing...you know there was Lady Vincent Fairfax in Sydney and Lady so and so in....

What was the influence of the titled ladies?

* Comments from Emma [p.13]: “we don’t have those wealthy philanthropic women in early childhood anymore...they're all dying and as far as I can see they're not being replaced and so there was something and I don’t know whether this fits in with what you’re thinking in relation to quality but there was something about the power and influence of those women whose influence let's face it often came from their husbands money but who had tremendous influence and who could ring up the Prime Minister or have dinner with the Minister for Children’s Services, socially because they were friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific implications for further discussion in the article:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A focus on children’s development, qualified staff and physical arrangements for quality – what ideology underpinned thinking existed at this time with this focus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The seeds of an emphasis on the importance of quality in child care moving into the political mainstream</td>
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