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.

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 two 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/or 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 through a rapid increase in the demand for qualified teachers and the provision of 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 (1979, 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 politics (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 pathways (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; Ailwood, 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, Sumasion & 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, Sumison & 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 & Willekens, 2009), 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. 95) explains that between 1972 and 1975 (and subsequently 1983–96):

> 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...
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 (MacLure, 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 (Ball, 2008). 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, 1998). 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 Kerry, a former senior state education official. Kerry 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 Joh1 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.

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 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 (Sumsion, 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:

... 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.

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 these children. She explained:

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 (Scheiwe & 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 NQF (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 (Cwlth).


References


