

CONSTRUCTS OF QUALITY IN SCHOOL BASED CHILDCARE FOR
0-3 YEAR OLDS WITHIN ONE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
CATHOLIC SCHOOL.

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Historically, the responsibility to 'educate' children and the responsibility to 'care' for children has been distinct. International research has articulated that the care and education of children should not continue in a dichotomous fashion, if, as a society, Australia is to improve long term outcomes for children. International research has been pivotal in the Australian Government's quality reform of services for children in the early years. A result of this quality reform has been the development of a new phenomenon in Western Australian Catholic schools in 2009, the introduction of school based childcare for 0-3 year olds. The present study examined constructs of quality education and care within this new phenomenon, at one Catholic school based childcare. Constructs of quality were shaped from the perspectives of two stakeholder groups: five staff and five parents. To form these constructs of quality, a qualitative approach was adopted, utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. A further element of this study was a comparison of stakeholder constructs of quality with indicators of quality in newly implemented policy, the *National Quality Standard (2009b)*. Findings indicated that both staff and parents understood quality in terms of five master themes: relational, environmental, social emotional, educational and staffing. Through the analytical process, two over-arching characteristics were identified; the ability of the centre to be both 'home-like' and 'school-like'. Through thematic and document analysis, comparisons were then made to the *National Quality Standard (2009b)*. In doing so, it became evident that this policy does include the characteristics of quality that were valued by the stakeholder groups.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

The issue of quality education and care in early childhood has been brought to the forefront of the Australian political agenda. International research conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2006) has clearly highlighted the limitations of practices that divide education and care. In particular, the OECD paper *Starting Strong II (2006)* stated that, “Currently, real limitations on system coherence are imposed in Australia” (OECD, 2006, p. 272) and that “Research suggests that a more unified approach to learning should be adopted in both the early childhood education and the primary school systems” (OECD, 2006, p. 13). Such findings explicitly identify the need for system integration, or continuity, across the education and care sectors. Historically, the early years of schooling tended to reflect a division whereby the responsibility to ‘care’ and the responsibility to ‘educate’ were distinct. *Starting Strong II (2006)* illustrated that the care and education of children should not continue in a dichotomy if, as a society, Australia was to improve long term outcomes for children. The outcomes that *Starting Strong II (2006)* recommended included “better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning” (OECD, 2006, p. 9). The OECD (2006) suggested that these outcomes for children could be improved through integrated services; that is, services that provide for *both* the education and care of children. The OECD (2006) research has been influential in both the Australian Government’s quality reform of services for children in the early years (COAG, 2009a) and the new phenomenon of school based services.

The Australian Government’s quality reform in early childhood has been informed by international research, as evidenced within *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* (COAG, 2009a), which made reference to the OECD’s international research (2006). *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* (COAG, 2009a) advocated for integrated services that

offer high quality education and care as part of a larger national 'quality agenda'. Integrated service provision is defined in a number of ways in existing literature. For the purpose of this study, the following definition from Press, Sumison and Wong (2010, p. 53) has been adopted:

Integrated services provide access to multiple services to children and families in a cohesive and holistic way. They recognise the impact of family and community contexts on children's development and learning and focus on improving outcomes for children, families and communities. Through respectful, collaborative relationships, they actively seek to maximise the impact of different disciplinary expertise in a shared intent to respond to family and community contexts.

Discourse on quality found its way into the political arena as research evidence affirmed the link between high quality early years services and long term gains for society (NICHD Early Childhood Care research Network, 2002). This policy document foreshadowed the OECD's (2006) international research on the long term benefits for individuals and society of providing quality services for children in the early years of life, defined as birth to age eight. The vision to connect education and care was made explicit. A key target in *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* (COAG, 2009a) was identified as the provision of high quality, affordable and accessible services. Outcome 4 in the document stated the need for the integration of services through the development of new infrastructure. In Western Australia, this new infrastructure came into existence, in 2009, with the introduction of school based childcare services; that is, the provision of childcare on a primary school site. It is these services and their stakeholders (staff and parents) that formed the basis for this study.

1.2 Aims of the Study

Policy changes, initiated at the Australian federal level by COAG, have had implications for childcare service provision within Western Australia. Historically, the school has been perceived as a context for education, and the childcare service as a context

focused on care (Childcare Act, 2007; School Education Act, 1999). Whilst other states in Australia have provided for integrated service delivery from 2005 (Press, Sumsion & Wong, 2010), a unique time exists within Western Australia, as services not only attempt to integrate education and care sectors, but also comply with standards of quality within their service. Of further significance, research that will be discussed in the review of literature indicates that quality should be interpreted at a local level by a range of stakeholders, and it is this challenge that this research has sought to respond to.

Extensive international research has been conducted in the field of childcare, particularly in regards to childcare choice (Bowes, Harrison, Wise, Sanson, Ungerer, Watson & Simpson, 2004; Boyd, Tayler & Thorpe, 2010; Gray, Baxter & Alexander 2008; Wailoo, Anderson, Petersen & Jackson, 2002). However, the significance of this present study lies in its investigation of the meanings of 'quality childcare' from the perspective of stakeholders within the context of an integrated service during a time of reform.

Specifically, this study aimed to investigate perspectives of 'quality' education and care held by stakeholders within the context of one Catholic school based childcare that catered for 0-3 year olds, in Western Australia.

In doing so, the following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How is 'quality education and care' within childcare described by individuals from various stakeholder groups?
2. How do stakeholders' perspectives of quality childcare align with the *National Quality Standard*?

1.3 Background and Context

Historically, in Australian settings, the education and care of children outside the home, has been segregated. Childcare, in the form of Long Day Care, can be closely

compared to what were termed 'Day Nurseries' in the early 1900s (Bowes & Grace, 2009). Their origins are closely tied to the Australian Government's need to retain women in the workforce after World War II. Day Nurseries were said to offer care for children, as opposed to educating them, and it is this differentiation that has continued to exist in Australian society.

Day nurseries operated for the care and wellbeing of children, particularly for the benefit of working mothers and, at the same time, kindergartens and preschools in the education sector increased in number (Brennan, 2007). Whilst the provision of education of children at a young age was a movement influenced by educational thinkers such as Froebel and de Lissa (Bowes & Grace, 2009), Day Nurseries, or childcare centres, were motivated by the needs of working mothers. Childcare centres, from the outset, have been services that are "shaped by the concerns and priorities of the societies and cultures within which they are located" (Elfer, 2007, p. 3).

As these not-for-profit childcare facilities continued to develop within Australia, the Australian Government saw the need to invest its interest. The motivation for this interest is seen to be tied to three other significant societal changes occurring at this time, described by Press and Hayes (as cited in Logan, Press & Sumsion, 2012) as - "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 rights to paid employment; and demand for women's labour" (p. 7).

In 1972, the Commonwealth Government of Australia passed the *ChildCare Act*, the first legislation specifically concerned with the care of children younger than school age. Within this policy, the Government committed funds to the future development of childcare as well as detailing operating regulations for services. Over the next decade, childcare was viewed as meeting the demand of working mothers and research focused on whether childcare was detrimental to the development of the child (Logan, Press & Sumsion, 2012).

In Australia, the 1980s and 1990s saw the introduction of other forms of childcare, excluded from this review, such as services where children were cared for in the home of a child-minder, referred to as Family Day Care (OECD, 2006). The late 80s and early 90s also brought the introduction of privatisation in the childcare sector. Sumsion (2006) described the rapid privatisation of childcare, stating that “from 1991 to 2001, the number of places in privately owned for-profit childcare services increased by almost 400 per cent, compared to only 55 per cent in not-for-profit services” (p. 4). The introduction of multiple childcare options signified the economic interest that was arising from the demand for childcare. This same period of time saw the establishment of the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC), whose role was to “support and improve the quality of care provided by Australian childcare services” (Tainton, 2010, p.2). The introduction of the NCAC clearly placed quality on the political agenda as well as emphasising, for the first time, the need to ensure standards and regulations within the childcare sector. This led to a change in research focus from the previous decade, to consider which childcare alternatives were best for the child (Logan, Press & Sumsion, 2012).

Demand for childcare provision continued to increase into the 21st Century. The OECD reported that in Australia in 2006 “the percentage of women with at least one child below six years who participated full-time in the labour force was 14.5%” (p. 268). In Western Australia, the responsibility for providing childcare in order to retain women in the workforce belonged to the Government Department for Communities, whilst the Department for Education held responsibility for the education of children.

At a national level, in 2007, the then Labor leader, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, acknowledged research undertaken by the OECD (2006) in his New Directions Paper titled ‘*The Australian economy needs an education revolution*’. In this paper, Rudd (2007) highlighted that Australia performed poorly in the area of early childhood when compared to other OECD countries, largely due to the limited investment by the Government into this area. A suggestion was then made that increased investment in services for children younger than school age would have long term positive benefits for society in the future (Rudd, 2007). The *Child Care Act of 1972* was then replaced by

the *Child Care Act of 2007*. This updated legislation recognised the need for the services highlighted by Rudd (2007) and aimed to “protect, and promote the best interests of, children who receive child care services” (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2007, p. 16).

Research at this time signified a view that quality was concerned with more than licensing, and investigations into stakeholder interpretations of quality became widespread. Findings of empirical research of interpretations of quality within the childcare context “highlight the complexity of quality as a multi-dimensional construct” (Logan, Press & Sumsion, 2012, p. 9). Discourse on quality during this period therefore became concerned with defining aspects or criteria of quality and recognised the relationship between high quality care and both social and economic gains.

Most significantly, in 2009, came the initiatives by COAG, *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* and the *National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Aged Care*. These initiatives were pivotal in driving the integration of services prior to schooling. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) clearly articulated, in both of these policies, the need for increased access and facilities within the 0-5 age group as well as the need for consistency nationally between service providers (COAG, 2009b).

Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy and the *National Quality Standard*, both formulated by COAG, have fundamentally framed the context of the national ‘quality agenda’. Both of these policy documents advocate for change, from the former segregation of care and education to a model of integration. The impetus for this policy change was the recognition of the relationship between quality and both social and economic gains for wider society and therefore the improvement of quality across integrated contexts within early childhood. A regulatory body, the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), was subsequently formed in 2011, to oversee the rating of services against the *National Quality Standard (2009b)*.

In Western Australia, the Premier in 2009 announced a significant move to align with international trends in early childhood education and care, stating that the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia would be accountable for Early Childhood Development (Cameron, 2009). This development led to the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning which holds responsibility for the provision of childcare located on school sites.

The introduction of school-based childcare sits within this political context, framed most specifically by the work of COAG and managed under Western Australian state systems. As a result of the introduction of these initiatives, in 2009, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia opened their first childcare centres, catering for the Long Day Care of children younger than school age, on three of their existing school sites. This initiative demonstrated a shift in thinking from the segregation of education and care that existed in the last century, to a new understanding of integrated services, as well as demonstrating a clear alignment to Australian Government policy.

One of the school-based childcare services was the setting for this study, which focused on constructs of quality in school-based childcare for 0-3 year olds. The specific context of Catholic schooling within Western Australia is also pertinent. Catholic Schools, under the direction of the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA), have a long history, one that goes back to the 1840s, and this sector has grown over this time to encompass 157 schools in 2013, ranging from the education and care of children in the early years through to secondary education (CEOWA, 2011a). CEOWA “strives to facilitate the delivery of an authentic and empowering Catholic education aimed at improving learning outcomes and life opportunities for the maximum possible number of children families and communities across Western Australia” (CEOWA, 2011a, para. 1). The Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (2011b) outlined in its policy *2-B6 Early Childhood Education and Care*, guidelines for its childcare facilities, including operating hours and alignment with regulatory policies, such as the Childcare Act 2007.

The policies and initiatives outlined above reflect a growing need for childcare across Australian society. Concurrently, discourse on quality has been brought to the forefront of the political agenda, indicating that not only are more services required, but that these services should provide high quality education and care. Research undertaken by the OECD (2006) indicated that there was demand for childcare provision within Australia, stating that “The rise in female participation rates together with a growing awareness of the importance of early education and socialisation for young children have contributed to increase the demand for child-care services” (OECD, n.d, p. 145). This statement by the OECD highlighted the increased need for services providing for the care of children outside the home, and as a result, integrated services, such as those provided by the CEOWA, have been established to meet this need.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The research questions that guided this study were identified through a review of the existing literature. The following chapter explores the literature pertaining to quality education and care in school based childcare through the following three sections: quality education and care; assessment of quality in childcare, and; the political context Chapter Three: Research Approach and Design articulates how Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was chosen as the method to investigate stakeholders’ perspectives of quality provision. Chapter Four: Results, and the subsequent Chapter Five: Discussion, aim to interpret the narrative of the participants and to discuss emergent themes in the context of the extant literature, therefore responding to the first research question. Chapter Five: Discussion also compares stakeholder responses to the *National Quality Standard (2009b)*, thus addressing the second research question. Key implications from the investigation and suggestions for future research are outlined in Chapter Six: Conclusion.

1.5 Chapter Summary

The historic division between education and care has been bridged with the introduction of school based childcare in Western Australia. At the same time, the Australian Government has implemented new policies for quality assurance within the childcare sector. This study has sought to explore the ways in which quality education and care, within school based childcare, is described by two stakeholder groups, parents and staff, at *Primary School A*. In the following chapter, a review of literature is undertaken to provide context to this investigation.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This literature review explores three related areas concerning quality in childcare, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. The first of these is the literature pertaining to the definition of 'quality' in childcare contexts, including the identification of characteristics of quality. This leads into a discussion on the ways in which perspectives of quality have been gathered, including the identification of whose perspectives have been gained, or, in some cases, omitted. Literature pertaining to the assessment of quality within childcare and the various tools used to make judgements on quality in this setting will then be explored. Following this exploration of existing research, this literature review will describe and discuss key policy and legislation influencing education and care sectors within Western Australia.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Figure 2.1 below illustrates the three topics of quality examined in this review of literature.

Constructs of quality in school based childcare for 0-3 year olds within one Western Australian Catholic school

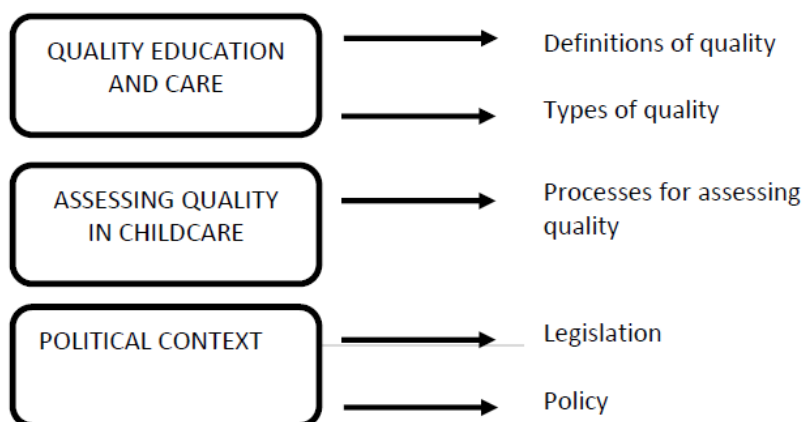


Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework

2.3 Scope of the Literature Review

Prior to undertaking an exploration into the various bodies of literature relevant to this study, it is necessary to explicate the scope of this review and to define the terms that will be used. Childcare, as referred to in this study, limits itself to those facilities offering Long Day Care. Long Day Care centres “primarily cater to children from birth to school age. They are open for at least eight hours a day, five days a week and 48 weeks per year” (OECD, 2001, p.7). It is such services that were the focus of this study, therefore excluding both Family Day Care (where children are cared for by a child-minder in a family home) and Outside of School Hours Care services (where school aged children are cared for outside the hours of the school day). With this understanding of childcare, this research investigated constructs of quality childcare. A construct can be defined as an “idea or theory containing various conceptual elements, typically considered to be subjective” (Oxford Dictionary, 2013). These constructs (ideas and theories) of quality childcare were created from the perspectives of stakeholders, identified as staff working at the centre and parents whose children attend.

2.4 Quality Education and Care

Central to the review of literature is an understanding of research undertaken on what constitutes ‘quality’ education and care. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) considered the ‘discourse of quality’; providing several definitions of how it was interpreted across industries. In general terms, quality, they explained, is concerned with “reliability, dependability, predictability and consistency” (Dahlberg et al. 1999, p.89), descriptors that are also evident when reviewing literature for the term ‘quality’ in a childcare environment. As Dahlberg et al. (1999) articulated, “the age of quality is now well and truly upon us” (p.4). Discourse on quality is often defined “in a specific policymaking context” (Krejsler, 2012, p. 100) in that discussions of quality are closely connected to policies and legislations that have existed at particular times; however, whilst the policy perspective is essential, and will form part of this review, the initial investigation of the term quality will be undertaken through a critical review of existing research.

A problem associated with defining a term such as 'quality' is the subjective and evaluative nature of the word (Dahlberg et al. 1999). Since the 1980s, interpretations of quality within the context of education and care has been widely investigated (Dahlberg et al. 1999) and often contested, and issues and interpretations surrounding quality are invariably raised in discussions on childcare (Ishimine, Wilson & Evans, 2010). Empirical research linking childcare quality to children's development and the possible effects of this are extensive (Bowes, Harrison, Wise, Sanson, Ungerer, Watson & Simpson, 2004; Hansen & Hawkes, 2009). Studies highlight the long term benefits of good quality childcare, both for the child and for wider society (Gallinsky, 2006; Logan, Press & Sumsion, 2012); however, the focus of this review is to examine research that contributes to the meaning of 'quality' education and care, and the ways in which judgments of quality is constructed within a specific childcare context.

Logan and Sumsion (2010) contributed to the discussion on quality through reviewing interpretations of quality childcare. The researchers have clustered these interpretations into three broad categories, namely modernist, post-modernist and reflective. Quality from a modernist viewpoint is considered to be a measurable construct, tied to objective criteria rated against a norm. A post-modernist approach understands quality as being connected to cultural beliefs, and therefore it is seen to be a socially constructed concept that is value-laden. Similar to the post-modernist approach, quality from a reflective stance is also value-laden, but makes use of both quantifiable and qualitatively measureable criteria. The study undertaken by Logan and Sumsion (2010) involved interviewing childcare staff on their perspectives of quality provision within their service. Findings suggested "that there is a need to consider new ways to articulate understandings about quality as a complex and interconnected phenomenon. They also indicated the need to highlight and explore less tangible aspects of quality" (p.47).

The post-modernist and reflective approaches to quality, detailed by Logan and Sumsion (2010) are consistent with current interpretations of quality in childcare. The understanding that quality is socially and culturally constructed, and that quality can be based on quantifiable and qualitative criteria, is evidenced in Government policy.

Similarly, Woodhead (as cited in Brownlee, Berthelsen & Segaran, 2009) draws out the idea of quality as being socially constructed, stating that “quality is increasingly recognised as a relative concept shaped by socio-cultural values, as well as national, economic and political contexts” (p. 454). The qualitative study undertaken by Brownlee, Berthelsen and Segaran (2009) investigated childcare workers’ perspectives of quality provision, finding that quality was predominately viewed as related to staff’s ability to meet the needs of the child.

Furthermore, da Silva and Wise (2006) chose to investigate perspectives of childcare quality held by parents as opposed to staff, with a focus on cultural differences. Da Silva and Wise (2006) interviewed 238 parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds, asking them to rank childcare features, such as accessibility, responsiveness to culture and nurturing, in order of importance. Within ‘responsiveness to culture’, parents ranked statements such as, *celebrating cultural holidays and celebrations* and *carers talk to the child in their own language*. Results from this research strongly indicated that understandings of quality are tied to cultural values. This was reflected in parents’ responses, in ranking highly the caregiver’s sensitivity to cultural differences. This further supports the before-mentioned study’s findings that quality is socially and culturally constructed.

Boyd, Tayler and Thorpe (2010) contributed to the research on parents’ perspectives of quality in their paper titled, *‘Preferences of first-time expectant mothers for care of their child: ‘I wouldn’t leave them somewhere that made me feel insecure’*’. Whilst primarily concerned with reasons for choosing between a variety of childcare alternatives, this study presented findings that provide insights into parents’ understandings of ‘high-quality’ childcare services. Boyd, Tayler and Thorpe (2010) used questionnaires and interviews with 124 participants and found that relational aspects of care, such as having their child cared for by a mature adult, developing positive relationships between their child and the carers, and ensuring their child’s needs were being met, were all considered to be paramount in any service offering ‘quality’ care.

Research that considers who key stakeholders are when investigating quality childcare is also evident. Fenech (2012) has stated that “further understanding of parents’ views about quality in childcare is critical” (p. 327) and whilst the previously discussed studies have identified the parent or staff stakeholder groups, other studies suggest a wider sample of stakeholders may be needed. Weaven and Grace (2010) involved both staff and parent groups in their qualitative research on perceptions of quality in childcare services. The focus of their study targeted differences in stakeholder perceptions between ‘for-profit’ and ‘not-for-profit’ providers through the use of semi-structured interviews. This Western Australian study found that both stakeholder groups placed importance on procedural aspects of quality, such as relationships and responsiveness to the child’s needs. Existing studies have indicated stakeholder groups might also include children, educational experts and policy makers, as quality can be perceived as having “multiple truths and voices” (Einarsdottir, 2005, p. 471).

Farquhar’s (as cited in Huntsman, 2008) research reports that, as opposed to stakeholders, three key points of view must be considered when investigating quality childcare. Specifically, Farquhar refers to these as the child development perspective, the government or regulatory perspective and the parent perspective. Similarly, Logan, Press and Sumsion (2012) have suggested, through an analysis of existing literature, that quality childcare can be discussed within seven streams; economic and social gains, characteristics of quality, stakeholder perspectives, contemporary and historical examinations, policy perspectives, critiques of quality and contextual factors. These seven areas identified by Logan et al. (2012) articulate the major areas of research in any discussion on quality in childcare.

In evaluating empirical research within the field, common trends emerge. Firstly, there is the acknowledgement that “good child care quality is associated with a variety of positive outcomes for young children” (NICHD Early Childhood Care research Network, 2002, p.199) and for society (Farrell, Tayler & Tennent, 2004). These outcomes are described in terms of educational success (Mashburn et al. 2008) and growth of social capital (OECD, 2006). Secondly, empirical research clearly specifies the need to consider multiple stakeholder perspectives of childcare quality. Stakeholders are most

commonly recognised as policymakers, educational staff, parents, families and children and this research notes that these perspectives must interact with each other (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002). Finally, empirical research also indicates that quality education and care consists of numerous elements and that “further research is clearly needed because there is much we still do not know” (Vandell, 2004, p. 407) about constructs of quality. In particular, research is consistent in suggesting that ‘quality’ be considered within a particular context; that is, that quality is socially constructed and should take into account the needs and identities of the local community (Tobin, 2005).

Evident in many of the studies on childcare quality is the acknowledgement that a common limitation in evaluating a value-laden term such as ‘quality’ is the attempt to reduce its complexity into aspects that can be easily measured, therefore narrowing conceptions of quality (Lee & Walsh, 2005). When childcare quality is deemed to be about what is good for the child (Brownlee, Berthelsen & Segaran, 2009; Ceglowski, 2004) and a major ingredient of the ability to provide for quality in services is the people and relationships that exist between staff and children (Smith, 1999), making judgements on quality becomes challenging.

Suggestions as to how the challenge of assessing quality might be overcome are limited. A key contribution to the field of quality in childcare Katz’s model (as cited in Harrist, Thompson & Norris, 2007). This model presents quality as a construct that should take into account the perspectives of four key stakeholders, namely; researcher/policy maker, caregiver, child and parent. This model has been frequently adopted in empirical studies, such as those undertaken by Ceglowski and Bacigalupa (2002); Ceglowski (2004); and Harrist, Thompson and Norris (2007). The Katz model describes these four key stakeholder groups as top-down, inside-out, bottom-up and outside-in respectively and, in doing so, views quality as a construct of both physical resources (indoor play space, child-staff ratios) and processes (partnerships with families, staff-child relationships).

Research on childcare quality largely recognises two forms– structural quality and process quality (Ishimine, Tayler & Bennett, 2010; Ramey & Ramey, 2006). Structural quality refers to aspects that can be observed and regulated, such as the qualifications of staff, child to staff ratios and the physical environment (Tayler, Wills, Hayden & Wilson, 2006). Process quality pertains to the programs adopted and management strategies, as well as the quality of the relationships and interactions that develop between staff, children and families (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002; Tayler, Wills, Hayden & Wilson, 2006). Research shows that “both process quality ...and structural [quality]... features have been consistently found to predict children's cognitive, language, and social development, even when extensive covariates are included in analyses” (Vandell, 2004, p. 407). Vandell (2004) summarises research undertaken by the NICHD Early Child Care Network (2002):

The NICHD Study found that the observed quality of care was a consistent predictor of child outcomes during the first years of life, with the language stimulation provided by the caregiver – a process variable – being positively related to children’s performance on measures of cognitive and linguistic abilities at ages 15, 24 and 36 months. Process quality during the first three years of life was related to children’s pre-academic skills of expressive and receptive language at age three. (p.9)

The relationship between quality and positive outcomes for children in the early years described by the NICHD in the above quote, is made explicit in the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study that was conducted in the United Kingdom. The EPPE longitudinal study found that “high quality pre-school education could help to alleviate the effects of social disadvantage and could provide children with a better start to school” (Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammons & Melhuish, 2008, p. 3). The EPPE study suggested that the linking of children’s success in school, and in later life to definitions of quality poses implications on how judgements of quality can be made. In particular, the EPPE study described the importance of both structural and process elements of quality

In further support of the importance of structural and process quality, Tayler et al (2006) summarises literature on the topic by stating that “children, families,

communities and society (nations) benefit from high quality ECEC – experientially, educationally, socially and economically” (p. 14). In the paper, *‘International best-practices in pedagogy, curriculum and operational procedures: Research evidence pertinent to the conduct of kindergarten, pre-primary and the early years in Western Australia’*, Tayler (2009) explains that whilst structural aspects are frequently used as criteria for judging quality, in fact empirical evidence confirms the “critical importance of relationships and interactions as fundamentals driving ...quality programs and shaping the kinds of outcomes demonstrated by programs” (p. 5).

The interpretation of quality as both structural and process orientated has found its way into Australian federal policy, most recently within the *National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care* (2009b), which is in the early stages of implementation across Australian childcare services. Within this policy document, COAG introduced the ‘National Quality Standard’, a tool to assess the quality of childcare services on aspects outlined in Table 1.0, such as the educational program, children’s health and safety, collaborative partnerships with families and communities and staffing arrangements (COAG, 2009b); a combination, therefore, relating to both process and structural quality.

2.5 Assessing Quality Childcare

Defining quality within childcare contexts leads to the need for an assessment of quality. As indicated, the *National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care* (2009b, p.6) outlines the assessment process, stating that it “combines the seven quality areas”

with a five point rating scale that describes the quality of early childhood education and care and OSHC [Outside School Hours Care] that all families, services and the broader community should expect to find in the diverse childhood education and care settings available across Australia.

The need to assess quality in early childhood education and care settings aligns with international trends. Research indicates several drivers for making judgements of

quality, noting that in making an assessment of quality it is possible to ensure and maintain a recognised standard as determined by the regulatory authority (Ishimine, Tayler & Bennett, 2010). It is also argued that rating quality allows for continual improvement and provides services with incentive and acknowledgement for their work (Ishimine, Tayler & Bennett, 2010). In addition, literature on quality assurance processes argues that “measuring quality is necessary to ensure all children have a good start to life” (Ishimine, Tayler & Bennett, 2010, p. 70) and that high quality childcare results in positive outcomes for children, and therefore has long term benefits for society (Brownlee, Berthelsen & Segaran, 2009; Ghazvini & Mullis, 2002; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002).

2.6 Tools for Assessing Quality

Several tools for assessing quality within education and care contexts have been developed and adopted internationally. Three of these have been selected as offering valuable contributions to the present discussion: the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, and the Effective Provision of Pre-School Program.

2.6.1 Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS).

The United States introduced the widely adopted Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) in the 1980s, now known as the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R), an observational scale used to compare the varying characteristics of early childhood settings (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). Its designers describe the ECERS as providing “a relatively short and efficient means of looking seriously at the quality of the (early years) environment” (Harms & Clifford, 1980, p. 4). The ECERS-R identifies seven areas of quality aimed at settings involving children aged 2.5 to 5 years of age and has been adopted in a variety of countries (Ishimine, Tayler & Bennett, 2010). The seven areas of the ECERS-R include: space, furnishings, routines, language reasoning, activities, interactions and program

structure. Services are assessed according to these criteria by external auditors and are provided with an overall score between one and seven, with seven indicating excellent quality (Mashburn, Pianta, Hamre, Downer, Barbarin, Bryant, Burchinal, Early, & Howes, 2008). Results from studies that have adopted the ECERS-R provide guidance for quality improvement, particularly targeting the role of professional development in this process of improvement (Mashburn et al. 2008).

2.6.2 Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).

In response to the ECERS, Pianta, La Paro and Hamre (2007) formulated the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) in the United States. CLASS was designed as an observational instrument to assess quality in early years classrooms, and was intended “to address limitations of other instruments by providing a common metric, vocabulary, and descriptive base for classroom practices from prekindergarten to grade 3” (La Paro, Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004, p. 424). This form of quality assessment organises elements into three categories: emotional climate, management and instructional support, with sub-points within each. Emotional climate focuses on the interactions between the caregiver and child and examines the enthusiasm and enjoyment of the child and responsiveness of the teacher (La Paro et al. 2004). Management factors include the flexibility of the teacher to follow the interests of the children, management of behaviour, productivity and construction of routines (La Paro et al. 2004). Instructional support includes indicators relating to the ability of the teacher to develop higher order thinking in children, engaging and facilitating learning and providing constructive, timely feedback (La Paro et al. 2004).

The CLASS hypothesises that the interactions that occur between teachers and students are the “mechanisms through which children learn” (Mashburn et al. 2008, p.735). Therefore, a significant contribution of this system is its observational focus on aspects of process quality; however, limitations are identified regarding its ability to measure structural quality (Ishimine, Tayler & Bennett, 2010).

2.6.3 Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE).

The EPPE longitudinal study makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of the construction and assessment of quality in early years settings. The EPPE study “investigated the effectiveness of preschool provision in England, following 2500 children from 140 centres from the age of three” (Tayler, 2009, p. 14). This particular research used stakeholder interviews, rating scales and case studies to gather demographic information about the children involved including family influences, parents’ level of education and social-behavioural information (Tayler, 2009). In its first phase, a key contribution of the study was its examination of the characteristics of various types of early years provision and the effects of these on later life. Findings indicated that “the quality of pre-school centres is directly related to better intellectual/cognitive and social/behavioural development in children” (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart & Elliot, 2003, p. 2) and that the “quality of the interactions between children and staff were particularly important” (Sylva et al. 2003, p. 3). Most significantly, the EPPE study identified five areas for quality improvement: adult-child verbal interactions; staff knowledge and understanding of the curriculum; staff knowledge of how young children learn; adults’ skills in helping children to resolve conflicts and assisting parents to support their child’s learning at home (Sylva et al. 2003). A key contribution of the EPPE study is the correlation it draws between social demographics and cognitive success when making judgements about quality education and care.

2.7 Critiques of Assessment Tools

Literature that refers to any of the tools presented in this discussion for the assessment of quality also clearly highlight the difficulty in attempting to measure such a value-laden concept. Douglas (2005) emphasised that if “rating scales are to have *credibility* and *acceptability* with the service to which they are to be applied, they must state clearly the basis of their value base” (p. 191). He also proposed that a major difficulty lies in finding a universal measure that accounts for a “diversity of values, philosophy and service provision” (Douglas, 2005, p. 191) across the sector,

particularly as research attempting to define quality has established that it is interpreted contextually. Ishimine, Tayler & Bennett (2010) also cautioned that any tool for assessing or rating quality should not focus simply on the representation of a scale (number, letter), as many tools are, but on the ability of the tool to provide meaningful feedback to centre staff and families to allow for quality improvement.

2.7.1 National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care.

The release of the *National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care* (2009b) in 2009, as discussed, was the initial attempt in Australia at providing a systematic method for making judgments on childcare quality. Elements within this policy document clearly align with well established international models comprising of aspects of both process and structural quality. Each of the seven elements within the *National Quality Standard* are judged on a rating scale and services are awarded an overall rating based on each of the individual Standards. These Standards can be found in Table 2. Ratings for the individual Standards, and the overall rating, are referred to as: significant improvement required; working towards National Quality Standard; Meeting National Quality Standard; Exceeding National Quality Standard; and Excellent (ACECQA, 2012).

An evaluation undertaken on the validity and reliability of the NQS as a tool for making judgements on quality in childcare indicated that the NQS can be used to gain consistent judgements for each of the Standards (Rothman, Kelly, Raban, Tobin, Cook, O'Malley, Ozolins and Bramich, 2012). This evaluation was concerned with the validity of the tool as opposed to the selection of the particular 'quality' standards to be included; however, it provides worthwhile feedback on the use of the NQS, as an assessment tool, in its early stages of implementation.

2.8 Policies and Legislation

In investigating constructs of quality education and care held by staff and parents, in the context of one school based childcare in WA, five key political contributions to the present state of school based childcare are explored. The first of these are legislative Acts dictating the responsibilities of the education sector and the childcare sector, known as the *School Education Act (1999)* and the *Childcare Act (2007)*, respectively. In 2012, a third legislation was added to this ensemble, the *Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012a*. The further two contributions have been identified as key policy documents released by COAG, titled *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy (COAG, 2009a)* and the *National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Aged Care (COAG, 2009b)*. In the following section, each of these legislative Acts and policy documents are examined in relation to their influence on quality education and care within school-based childcare.

2.8.1 School Education Act (1999).

The late 90s brought the *School Education Act (1999)*, a key legislative Act within the education sector. The *School Education Act (1999)* outlines responsibilities of schools such as governance, legal obligations of schools and student attendance. This Act clearly articulates four objectives:

- a) To recognise the right of every child in the State [of Western Australia] to receive a school education;
- b) To allow that education to be given in a Government school, a non-Government school or home;
- c) To provide for Government schools that meet the educational needs of all children; and
- d) To acknowledge the importance of the involvement and participation of a child's parents in the child's education.

(School Education Act, 1999, p.2)

In relation to meeting these objectives, several amendments were made to the original Act of 1999. Of particular significance are those made in the legislation regarding the years of pre-compulsory and compulsory schooling. The *School Education Amendment Bill 2012b* made important changes to the original Act, lowering the age of compulsory schooling by one year as of January 2013. In Western Australia, this meant that the Foundation Year (the year a child turns 5) became the first year of compulsory schooling. This amendment, along with the definition of compulsory schooling provided for in the original Act, signified the move of children who were previously cared for within the home or childcare service, to the context of a school site (Department of Education, 1999). A notable point to be made in regards to this amendment is that children aged below 3 years, who are not provided for in the pre-compulsory definition of schooling within the *School Education Act 1999*, cannot directly be offered services under the governance of the school (Alderson & Martin, 2011).

2.8.2 Childcare Act (2007).

Previously known as the *Childcare Act 1972*, this revised legislation reflects the need for consistency and improved quality within services that care for children outside the school environment. This legislative Act outlines regulatory requirements for compliance by services in order to operate as a childcare facility, with particular focus on licensing arrangements for services. An important aspect of The *Childcare Act (2007)* is that it specifically states its focus on care prior to school age, explicitly excluding children aged 3 years and above enrolled in educational programs on school sites. The *Childcare Act (2007)* primarily concerns itself with the care of children, in contrast to the before mentioned *School Act 1999*, which focuses on education. The *Childcare Act (2007)* underwent substantial amendments with the release of the *Education and Care Services National Law (WA) 2012a*. Most specifically, the definition of 'childcare' was revised to include both the education and care of children.

2.8.3 Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012.

The *Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012a* is Western Australian legislation which came into force in August of 2012. This Act made changes to several pre-existing Acts, including the *Childcare Act 2007*. The objectives of this legislation are:

- a) To ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of children attending education and care services;
- b) To improve the educational and developmental outcomes for children attending education and care services;
- c) To promote continuous improvement in the provision of quality education and care services;
- d) To establish a system of national integration and shared responsibility between participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth in the administration of the national education and care services quality framework;
- e) To improve public knowledge, and access to information, about the quality of education and care services;
- f) To reduce the regulatory and administrative burden for education and care services by enabling information to be shared between participating jurisdictions and the Commonwealth.

This addition to childcare and education legislation took into account changes to the childcare sector and reflected research evidence on the importance of quality in the early years. This legislation noted the role of services in providing for both the education and care of children, and this is clearly articulated in the stated objectives. Of particular significance, The *Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012a* included the procedure for being audited against the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b) and the responsibility of the regulatory body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), in governing this process.

2.8.4 Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy (COAG, 2009a).

This strategy was considered a “landmark document” (COAG, 2009c) by the Australian Government as it was the first of its kind to clearly advocate a shared vision for early years education and care in Australia over the next decade. A major contribution of *Investing in the Early Years* (COAG, 2009a) was its explicit call for a national move toward integrated service delivery. Outcome 4 in the document states the need for the integration of services through the development of new infrastructure – infrastructure that caters for both the care and education of children within a single service. As detailed in the discussion of the background and context to this study, this policy document was influenced by international trends, and regularly refers to research undertaken by the OECD on ways to improve outcomes for Australian children. This strategy also reflects of the empirical research that has been explored earlier in this review, such as the EPPE (Tayler, 2009) study, that recognises the links between high quality service provision in the early years and the successful achievement of social and cognitive outcomes in later development.

2.8.5 National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Aged Care (2009b).

The COAG policy initiative titled *The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Aged Care*, identified the need for streamlined regulatory arrangements, including quality assurances, for children aged from birth to eight years of age (COAG, 2009b). This framework comprises four initiatives, namely: a national legislative framework, a National Quality Standard, a national quality rating and assessment process and a new national body called ACECQA. The *National Quality Standard* (COAG, 2009b) is most pertinent as it outlines specific standards of quality required of services that provide both care and education for children from 0 to 5 years of age. The Standard is based on international research, as noted in *The Guide to the National Quality Standard* (COAG, 2010), and is designed to “give services and families a better understanding of a quality service” (ACECQA, 2012). The seven

Standards comprise elements of both process and structural interpretations of quality derived from empirical research (Ishimine et al. 2010, Ramey & Ramey, 2006; Tayler, 2009;). These Standards and the elements contained within each are outlined in Table 2.0 below.

Table 2.1

National Quality Standard: quality areas, standards and elements

QA1	Educational program and practice
1.1	An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child's learning and development.
1.1.1	Curriculum decision making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.
1.1.2	Each child's current knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program.
1.1.3	The program, including routines, is organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning.
1.1.4	The documentation about each child's program and progress is available to families.
1.1.5	Every child is supported to participate in the program.
1.1.6	Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and influence events and their world.
1.2	Educators and co-ordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child.
1.2.1	Each child's learning and development is assessed as part of an ongoing cycle of planning, documenting and evaluation.
1.2.2	Educators respond to children's ideas and play and use intentional teaching to scaffold and extend each child's learning.
1.2.3	Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, is regularly used to implement the program.
QA2	Children's health and safety
2.1	Each child's health is promoted.
2.1.1	Each child's health needs are supported.
2.1.2	Each child's comfort is provided for and there are appropriate opportunities to meet each child's need for sleep, rest and relaxation.
2.1.3	Effective hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.
2.1.4	Steps are taken to control the spread of infectious diseases and to manage injuries and illness, in accordance with recognised guidelines.
2.2	Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the program for children.
2.2.1	Healthy eating is promoted and food and drinks provided by the service are nutritious and appropriate for each child.
2.2.2	Physical activity is promoted through planned and spontaneous experiences and is appropriate for each child.
2.3	Each child is protected.
2.3.1	Children are adequately supervised at all times.
2.3.2	Every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and any hazard likely to cause injury.
2.3.3	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented.
2.3.4	Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are aware of their roles and responsibilities to respond to every child at risk of abuse or neglect.
QA3	Physical environment
3.1	The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service.
3.1.1	Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are suitable for their purpose.
3.1.2	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.
3.1.3	Facilities are designed or adapted to ensure access and participation by every child in the service and to allow flexible use, and interaction between indoor and outdoor space.
3.2	The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play.
3.2.1	Outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.
3.2.2	Resources, materials and equipment are sufficient in number, organised in ways that ensure appropriate and effective implementation of the program and allow for multiple uses.
3.3	The service takes an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future.
3.3.1	Sustainable practices are embedded in service operations.
3.3.2	Children are supported to become environmentally responsible and show respect for the environment.
QA4	Staffing arrangements
4.1	Staffing arrangements enhance children's learning and development and ensure their safety and wellbeing.

4.1.1	Educator-to-child ratios and qualification requirements are maintained at all times.
4.2	Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are respectful and ethical.
4.2.1	Professional standards guide practice, interactions and relationships.
4.2.2	Educators, co-ordinators and staff members work collaboratively and affirm, challenge, support and learn from each other to further develop their skills, to improve practice and relationships.
4.2.3	Interactions convey mutual respect, equity and recognition of each other's strengths and skills.
QA5	Relationships with children
5.1	Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.
5.1.1	Interactions with each child are warm, responsive and build trusting relationships.
5.1.2	Every child is able to engage with educators in meaningful, open interactions that support the acquisition of skills for life and learning.
5.1.3	Each child is supported to feel secure, confident and included.
5.2	Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.
5.2.1	Each child is supported to work with, learn from and help others through collaborative learning opportunities.
5.2.2	Each child is supported to manage their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.
5.2.3	The dignity and rights of every child are maintained at all times.
QA6	Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
6.1	Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.
6.1.1	There is an effective enrolment and orientation process for families.
6.1.2	Families have opportunities to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions.
6.1.3	Current information about the service is available to families.
6.2	Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.
6.2.1	The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child's learning and wellbeing.
6.2.2	Current information is available to families about community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.
6.3	The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children's learning and wellbeing.
6.3.1	Links with relevant community and support agencies are established and maintained.
6.3.2	Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.
6.3.3	Access to inclusion and support assistance is facilitated.
6.3.4	The service builds relationships and engages with their local community.
QA7	Leadership and service management
7.1	Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.
7.1.1	Appropriate governance arrangements are in place to manage the service.
7.1.2	The induction of educators, co-ordinators and staff members is comprehensive.
7.1.3	Every effort is made to promote continuity of educators and co-ordinators at the service.
7.1.4	Provision is made to ensure a suitably qualified and experienced educator or co-ordinator leads the development of the curriculum and ensures the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning.
7.1.5	Adults working with children and those engaged in management of the service or residing on the premises are fit and proper.
7.2	There is a commitment to continuous improvement.
7.2.1	A statement of philosophy is developed and guides all aspects of the service's operations.
7.2.2	The performance of educators, co-ordinators and staff members is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement.
7.2.3	An effective self-assessment and quality improvement process is in place.
7.3	Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality service.
7.3.1	Records and information are stored appropriately to ensure confidentiality, are available from the service and are maintained in accordance with legislative requirements.
7.3.2	Administrative systems are established and maintained to ensure the effective operation of the service.
7.3.3	The Regulatory Authority is notified of any relevant changes to the operation of the service, of serious incidents and any complaints which allege a breach of legislation.
7.3.4	Processes are in place to ensure that all grievances and complaints are addressed, investigated fairly and documented in a timely manner.
7.3.5	Service practices are based on effectively documented policies and procedures that are available at the service and reviewed regularly.

The elements within the Standard are used as criteria for making judgements on the level of quality provided by a childcare service. As previously mentioned, this judgement will be reported using the terms: significant improvement required;

working towards National Quality Standard; Meeting National Quality Standard; Exceeding National Quality Standard; and Excellent (ACECQA, 2012), and these ratings will be made publically available.

The implementation of a *National Quality Standard* (COAG, 2009b), whereby childcare services, including those operating on school sites, are independently audited on aspects of quality was the first initiative of its kind in Western Australia. The implementation of the *National Quality Standard* (COAG, 2009b), and therefore the rating of services by ACECQA, commenced on January 1st, 2012.

2.9 Chapter Summary

In exploring the literature on the discourse of 'quality' within childcare, a clear message is derived, that quality is a "relative concept shaped by socio-cultural values, as well as national, economic and political contexts in which early childhood services are provided" (Brownlee, Berthelson & Segaran, 2009, p.454). Therefore, research suggests there is a call to consider the "multi-dimensional nature of quality and how quality can be enacted in culturally and contextually relevant ways that are locally constructed" (Logan, Press & Sumsion, 2012, p. 10). A further insight is that multiple perspectives of quality ought to be gained and consideration must be given to the ways in which these various perspectives relate to each other (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002). Tobin (2005) has affirmed this, stating that "it is out of the conversations between parents, staff, and directors that quality standards most meaningfully can arise" (p. 433). Therefore, perspectives of quality have been gathered, in this study, from both staff and parent stakeholder groups within their specific childcare context. Following this, comparison has been made from the perspectives gathered to the quality criteria identified within the *National Quality Standard* (COAG, 2009b).

In summary, then, this review of literature has attempted to examine three areas of knowledge pertaining to constructions of quality education and care. These areas were: empirical research undertaken surrounding definitions of 'quality'; an

examination of tools used to assess quality in early childhood settings, and; the political and legislative literature that frames the context of school based childcare.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the literature relevant to quality in childcare settings and explored the political and legislative issues pertinent to this study. Chapter Three explains the research approach taken and the methods selected. The philosophical understanding that underpins this research into stakeholder perspectives of quality education and care within school based childcare is best characterised as a qualitative approach, as illustrated in Figure 3, below. The levels illustrated in Figure 3 will be explained in this chapter. With the qualitative philosophical understanding, an interpretivist theoretical perspective was adopted through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2004). Interviews and document analysis were then selected as the methods for gathering data. This research approach will be explored in more detail with particular reference to its suitability to the present study.

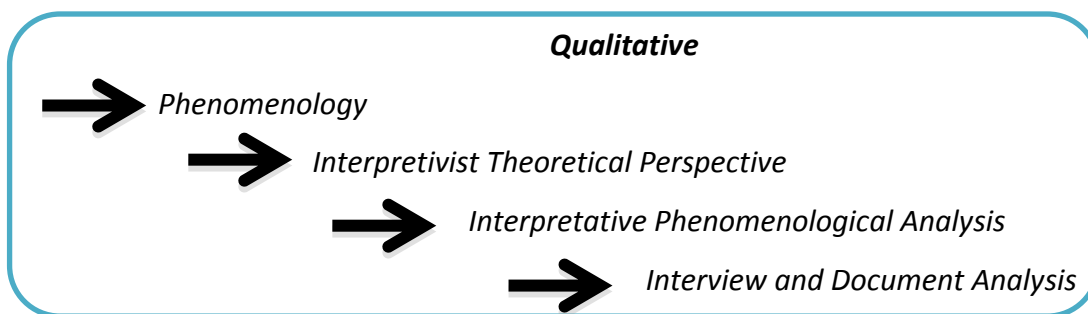


Figure 3.1 Research Design

3.2 Qualitative Approaches

Qualitative approaches imply “an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). As described by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), qualitative approaches can be simply defined as “the techniques associated with the gathering,

analysis, interpretation, and presentation of *narrative* information” (p. 6) and therefore were most suited to this particular research that focused on investigating staff and parent constructions of quality within the school based childcare. A strength of qualitative approaches, and therefore this research, is their ability to allow for the examination of issues in depth (Anderson, 2010), issues that are raised from human experience. As Anderson (2010) explained, “data based on human experience... is powerful and sometimes more compelling than quantitative data” (p. 2).

Qualitative research allows the researcher to “develop a complex picture of the problem...reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges” (Creswell, 2009, p.176). A qualitative study can “provide insight into the subtle nuances of educational contexts” (Kervin, Vialle, Herrington & Okely, 2006, p.37). Therefore, a qualitative approach was selected as an appropriate way of gathering and interpreting stakeholder perspectives to build a picture of how quality education and care in childcare was understood and constructed within the setting of one school based childcare centre. Whilst several paradigms, or lenses, exist within a qualitative approach, a phenomenological interpretivist paradigm was deemed to be best suited.

3.3 Phenomenological Approaches

Qualitative approaches draw on phenomenology, stemming from the belief that the world is complex, and seeks to understand this complexity; it attempts to make sense of social phenomena (Kervin, Vialle, Herrington & Okely, 2006). Phenomenology aims to “focus on people’s perceptions of the world in which they live and what this means to them” (Langdrige, 2007, p. 4) and, further, it involves the assumption that “there is some commonality to the perceptions that human beings have in how they interpret similar experiences” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p.437). A phenomenological view seeks to find the commonalities within the phenomena, putting aside the researcher’s preconceived ideas (Crotty, 1998). In the present study, such an approach allowed the researcher to investigate stakeholders’ perspectives of quality childcare within their specific context.

Qualitative studies, and therefore phenomenological approaches, place importance on “how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.10) with a focus on “words or observations that are difficult to quantify” (Glesne, 2010, p.283). A pertinent aspect of this approach is its subjective nature, allowing the researcher to “explore the ...experiences, ideas and feelings of participants” (Kervin et al., 2006, p.37). Subsequently, data within this approach is sought through engagement with research participants (Glesne, 2010), and is accurately described by Smith, Flowers and Larkin, as a “communicative action” (2009, p.45).

Langdridge (2007) iterates characteristics of a phenomenological approach, summarising them as four key features, below:

1. a focus on human experience as a topic in its own right;
2. a concern with meaning and the way in which meaning arises in experience;
3. a focus on description and relationships rather than interpretation and causality;
4. recognition of the role of the researcher in the co-construction of the topic under investigation and built on an understanding of the way in which all experience must be understood in context.

(Langdridge, 2007, p. 9)

These features of a qualitative phenomenological approach are evident within this investigation into staff and parent constructions of quality within the context of one school based childcare.

3.4 Interpretivist Theoretical Perspective

Since a qualitative phenomenological approach was selected as being appropriate for this study, it is necessary to further explain the underpinning theoretical perspective. As discussed, various paradigms exist within social research and it is these paradigms that “provide a way for seeing and inquiring into the world” (Glesne, 2010, p. 282). The interpretivist paradigm, or way of thinking, was deemed most applicable for this study.

The interpretivist paradigm is based on the assumption that “reality is socially constructed” (Glesne, 2010, p. 9). It can be described simply as “the belief that facts are not things out in some objective world waiting to be discovered, but, rather, are the social constructions of humans who apprehend the world through interpretive activity” (Ferguson, 1993, p. 36). An interpretivist perspective is about understanding another’s interpretation of their world – experiences, ideas, interactions – in a specific context (Glesne, 2010). The interpretivist perspective is grounded in hermeneutics (MacDonald, Kirk, Metzler, Nilges, Schempp & Wright, 2012) and, in educational research, has been influenced by scholars such as Denzin (1997) and Eisner (1991). MacDonald et al (2012) emphasise the usefulness of this perspective when “attempting to identify the specific sequence and significance of a particular social phenomenon” (p. 138) and thus this approach was deemed to be well suited to an investigation into the constructions of quality education and care within the context of school based childcare.

In choosing interpretivism as the theoretical perspective for this research, “it follows that the... methods [will] include interacting with people in their social contexts and talking with them about their perceptions” (Glesne, 2010, p. 8). The aim of such an approach is to gather knowledge through social interactions of how others understand their world. In the context of this study, then, the interpretivist paradigm allowed the researcher to focus on how individual stakeholders constructed and understood the notion of quality in early childhood education and care.

3.5 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Holding to this understanding of interpretivism, Smith’s (2004) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was viewed as a fitting research approach for eliciting stakeholders’ perspectives of quality education and care in childcare. As with all interpretivist perspectives, fundamental to this approach is the understanding of hermeneutics. Historically, hermeneutics has been concerned with biblical interpretation; however, it has transferred into scholarly contexts to emphasise the central role of language in making meaning and sharing understandings (Crotty, 1998).

Connecting this to IPA, Smith (2004) described that “one can say human research involves a double hermeneutic. The participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world” (p. 40).

IPA “aims to understand the lived experience of a conscious, situated, embodied being-in-the-world” (Larkin, Eatough & Osborn, 2011, p. 330) and consequently can be explained as concerned with both person and context. Existing research on perspectives of quality, specifically within childcare, clearly articulate the need for interpretations of the notion of quality to be sought from individuals within a local contextualised level and, as such, the use of IPA was employed for this study.

Smith (2004) elaborated on the view that IPA is concerned with both person and context by explaining that IPA has three characteristic features; it is idiographic, inductive and interrogative. These three characteristics fit effectively with this study. Firstly, being idiographic, Smith (2004) described IPA research as requiring detailed focus and analysis of a small sample. In doing so, Smith (2004) explained the ability of the researcher to conduct an in-depth investigation into each participant’s specific context. In relation to this study being idiographic, it sought to gain the perspectives of quality childcare provided by a small number of participants in their particular setting and exploring their personal perspectives before moving onto another context.

Secondly, Smith (2004) identified that IPA research is inductive. IPA researchers “do not attempt to verify or negate specific hypotheses established on the basis of extant literature; rather they construct broader research questions which lead to the collection of expansive data,” (p. 43) therefore allowing themes to emerge during the analysis of the gathered data. In the context of this specific investigation, the inductive nature of IPA was applicable as, through the use of semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, there was opportunity for unforeseen results to emerge.

In regards to the third characteristic identified by Smith (2004), that is, IPA being an interrogative process, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) noted the need for the

researcher to look inward, to reflect and to interrogate the self first, in an attempt to put aside personal assumptions. This process is referred to as bracketing, and was utilised in this study. The method has been widely used in idiographic studies investigating, for example, questions of identity, psychological and health issues, (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Faulkner and Davidson, 2004; Smith, 2004;) and is elaborated on further as a major consideration within IPA research.

3.6 Bracketing

The concept of bracketing finds its origins in phenomenology (Gearing, 2004) and is effectively described by Ashworth (1999) “to refer not to the turning away of the world and a concentrated detached consciousness but to a resolve to set aside theories, research propositions, ready-made interpretations, etc, in order to reveal engaged, lived experiences” (p. 708). It involves three phases: abstract formation, research praxis and reintegration (Gearing, 2004). The first phase, abstract formation, is the ability of the researcher to establish the theoretical perspective of the investigation, in this case identified as a phenomenological interpretivist perspective (Gearing, 2004). The second phase, research praxis, involves the researcher acknowledging bias, identifying the relationship between the researcher and the research, and putting aside preconceived ideas (Gearing, 2004). In relation to this investigation, this involves setting aside personal assumptions about quality in school based childcare and providing open-ended interview questions. Reintegration is the third phase of bracketing and although often overlooked, is a necessary component of the process (Gearing, 2004). Reintegration comprises drawing on and interpreting the bracketed data to inform the larger investigation (Gearing, 2004). As part of the bracketing process, the researcher was cognisant that their personal knowledge of the terms used within the National Quality Standard (2009b) should be avoided as part of the interview process.

The process of bracketing is similar to that of *epoche* referred to in phenomenological studies, and the terms are often used interchangeably (Bednall, 2006). *Epoche* is

explained by Bednall (2006) as “highlighting a particular period when significant events occur in the experiences of a researcher, but any impact from the memory of which need to be put aside during data collection” (p. 127). Philosophically, differences between epoche and bracketing have been identified (Ahern, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) however, essentially, the principle of setting aside the researcher’s preconceptions to “allow the voices of the subjectivity to emerge authentically” (Bednall, 2006, p. 126) underpin both processes.

Within this research, the processes of epoche and bracketing were employed to assist in minimising researcher bias, acknowledging that the researcher has worked in early childhood settings. In undertaking this practice, a researcher journal was utilised to aid in recording impressions, personal views and thoughts, particularly related to issues of quality at *Primary School A*. The researcher journal was used before and after each of the interviews with participants to note observations and thoughts. The use of the researcher journal will be explored further in the chapter when the procedure for data analysis is explained.

3.7 Selection of Participants and Data Collection

The Catholic school selected for this study is identified as *Primary School A*. *Primary School A* was selected purposively, as a provider of school based childcare. *Primary School A* was aligned to a co-educational school, providing facilities for children from infants through to Year 6 (Jackiewicz, S. personal communication, April 27, 2011). Founded in 1965 by a Religious Order, *Primary School A* had two classes of each year level. It was located approximately 25 kilometres from Perth, Western Australia, and had a socioeconomic status rating slightly above the Australian average of 1000 (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2011). *Primary School A* provided a policy on the operation of their childcare facility and stated operating hours of 6.30am to 6.30pm.

The interview is a method of data collection that is commonly used in social research (Neuman, 2011). Research into people’s perspectives of particular phenomena often adopts this qualitative tool (eg, Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002; Harrist, Thompson & Norris, 2007; Lee & Walsh, 2005). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explained that, in IPA, “we are aiming to design data collection events which elicit detailed stories, thoughts and feelings from the participant. Semi structured one-to-one interviews have tended to be the preferred means for collecting such data” (p. 57).

Two categories of participants were selected for this research. These were;

1. Staff (5) who had a role in both leading the school based childcare and working within it.
2. Parents (5) whose children attended the childcare service.

Participants in both categories were given pseudonyms so that they could only be identified by the researcher for the purpose of the interviews on their perspectives. Random sampling was used to select five participants within the parent group whose children provide for a range in ages 0-3 years, and the five parents who volunteered were selected as participants. This was a convenience sample. The interview process was undertaken on an individual basis with these parent participants. Staff were selected using purposive sampling ensuring the involvement of staff with a range of qualifications.

Semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded and followed the following structure below, as recommended by Creswell (2009):

- Date, time, place, interviewer, interviewee
- Introduction
- Key questions (5) (See Appendices A and B)
- Probe questions
- Adequate response time
- A thank you statement

(Creswell, 2009, p.183)

As mentioned, a researcher journal was also kept during the interview stage of data collection. The use of a researcher journal is a feature of IPA. The journal was used in the interview stage to assist in the process of 'bracketing' by providing an opportunity and context for the researcher to question motives and possible assumptions, recognising that the researcher had experience in early childhood education and care contexts and perspectives of her own.

3.8 Data Analysis

Interview data collected from all participants were analysed using thematic analysis. Interviews were conducted with individuals and digitally recorded, then transcribed. Interview transcripts were analysed according to a six step process, identified by Bednall, (2006), as is consistent with IPA protocols.

Bednall's (2006) stages of data analysis which were employed in this research, are detailed in Table 3.1 below;

Table 3.1

Bednall's Stages of IPA

Stage One: Iterative reading and 'flagging' items	Within this initial phase, interview transcripts were read repeatedly and items were 'flagged' for their relevance, taking into account the original interview questions and probe questions that also occurred.
Stage Two: Establishing topics of significance	During stage 2, items that were previously flagged were grouped together to form topics of significance.
Stage Three: Establishing thematic linkages	At this point, previous items of significance were re-evaluated and coding of themes became more focussed as the topics of significance were grouped together. Within this stage, the focus was on ensuring that bracketing had occurred.
Stage Four: Examining the flagged items for meaning	In this stage the transcripts were revisited to check that the major themes had been identified. Those themes that emerged as significant within the data were then further examined.
Stage Five: Reintegration or 'de-bracketing' epoche	This stage involved reconsidering any information that had previously been bracketed (evaluating information collected in the research journal) to see if these could inform the interpretation of the themes that emerged.
Stage Six: Fashioning the unity of the study	In this final phase, the interpretation of the themes and the possible connections between the themes were explored.

It was an intended outcome of this research that the data gathered would enable a subsequent discussion of the ways in which individual stakeholder constructs of quality education and care within school-based childcare align with the *National Quality*

Standard (COAG, 2009b), specifically in the context of *Primary School A*. Doing so addresses the second research question. Document analysis was then used as a method to compare themes evident from the interview phase with the constructs of quality made explicit within the key policy document, the *National Quality Standard* (2009b).

3.9 Trustworthiness and Dependability

Trustworthiness, also known as validity within the qualitative approach (Neuman, 2011), was ensured in the study through the following processes:

1. Process of bracketing was employed as part of an IPA approach
2. An audit trail of the processes involved was stored
3. As a range of stakeholders were selected for this research, triangulation occurred. Neuman (2011) states that triangulation is the process of “looking at something from multiple points”(p.164) thereby improving accuracy.

Dependability, defined as being “concerned with the extent to which variation in a phenomenon of interest can be explained consistently using the ‘human instrument’ across different contexts” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p.333), is often termed as ‘reliability’. Within this research study, dependability was ensured through the use of the researcher journal that noted changes within the contexts of the study and which provided the opportunity for the researcher to self reflect, avoiding personal bias that may exist.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

It is recognised that in undertaking qualitative research, the researcher becomes a guest in the participant’s context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As such, it is vital that the wellbeing of the participant is considered and that all ethical issues are discussed in advance. Careful consideration was given to all aspects of this research process to make certain that ethical standards were maintained. No-one was obliged to

participate and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. There were also no foreseen negative repercussions to this research study.

The following strategies were employed to ensure ethical practice:

- Confidentiality of identity was ensured through the use of pseudonyms in all forms of data collection.
- The purpose of the study was explained to participants through a written letter of information and informed consent was gained.
- Participants had the right to withdraw at any time of the research.
- The researcher had no prior relationship with any of the participants.
- Research conformed to all ethical requirements in obtaining ethical clearance

3.11 Data Storage

All data collected as part of this research project was and is securely stored by the researcher in a key locked filing cabinet. This data includes transcribed interviews and the researcher journal. Data will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

3.12 Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be termed “an explicit evaluation of the self” (Shaw, 2010, p. 234) and is employed in qualitative studies for its consideration of the social context of both the researcher and the participants (Shaw, 2010). Reflexivity “enables the researcher to formally acknowledge his or her interpretative role” (Fade, 2004, p. 2) and is closely linked to the process of bracketing described earlier in the chapter. As IPA was chosen as the method for this study, and IPA is grounded in understanding individuals’ experiences, reflexivity was a feature of the data collection and analysis stages of this research. In the data collection phase, the researcher used probing questions that deliberately avoided terms utilised in the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b),

instead, asking open questions such as, “Can you explain why you think this?” and “Because...?” In analysing the data, the researcher ensured that transcripts were analysed prior to any comparison being made to the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b) in an attempt to avoid bias. In acknowledging that the researcher has experience in the field of early childhood education and care, every attempt was made to ensure that an authentic representation of the participants’ story also emerged. The researcher journal was a feature of this study and assisted with separating the experiences of the researcher from that of the participants, therefore attempting to remove bias. The journal was utilised before and after each participant’s interview and the researcher noted thoughts, observations and preconceived ideas, particularly related to issues of quality.

3.13 Chapter Summary

IPA, as part of a qualitative approach to research, allowed participants to share their perspectives of quality within the context of school based childcare. The role of the researcher in this study was to interpret participants’ narratives and to understand their construction of quality education and care and, in doing so, to put aside personal preconceptions through the use of a journal. Chapter Four: Results will present the findings from the interviews and the subsequent Chapter Five: Discussion will examine these findings in relation to the key questions of this study: How is quality childcare described by individuals from various stakeholder groups and how do stakeholders’ perspectives of quality provision align with the *National Quality Standard*?

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to report the perspectives of quality education and care of the participants of this study. A feature of this chapter is the highlighting of participants' voices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five staff members of *Primary School A* and five parents whose child/ren attended the service. Interviews were conducted on an individual basis. Interviews were recorded and transcribed following the six stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as outlined in Chapter Three: Research Approach and Design. In abiding by the principles of IPA, a researcher journal was kept during the interview stage, and this proved to be useful in assisting with putting aside personal preconceived ideas about quality and in acknowledging the relationship that exists between the researcher and the research. The role of the research journal is discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

In the process of analysing the data using Bednall's (2006) stages of IPA, an iterative process was undertaken whereby interview transcripts were repeatedly read and items were flagged for their relevance. Table 4.1 provides an example of the initial stage of thematic analysis.

Table 4.1

Sample extract of transcription with themes

Initial Themes	Transcription
	I: Okay, so that leads us into the next question. What is it about this service that makes you feel comfortable to leave your child here?
Relationships Staff	R: I like the fact that there's a lot of one on one time and interaction with all the people that work here.
School-like Structure Education	I like the kind of pre-school structure in a way, because they have some more education, as well as just sending the kids constantly outside to play in the sandpit...
Feeling	...so yeah, it's been like a good feel...

Sub-themes were drawn out from each of the transcripts and grouped together to form five master themes. As suggested by Bednall (2006), any information that was bracketed was then considered to check whether it would influence the interpretation of themes; this part of the process will be explored in more detail at the end of the chapter. Master themes that emerged were evident across both participant groups and are presented in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2

Table of Themes

Master Themes	Sub-Themes	Participant's Evidence
1.Relational	The vibe	"A gut feel when you walk into a place"
	Relationships between staff, parent and child	"I think the relationships, as well, between the staff, between the children, between the families"
2.Environmental	Location	"Well, I guess it's to do with proximity"
	Hygiene	"That the kids are clean"
	Safety	"They're all enclosed in a safe area so it's good"
	Routines	"I guess that homely stuff"
	Resources	"Sort of like nice stuff"
3.Social Emotional	Wellbeing	"I would like to see the children...playing, having fun"
	Happy children	"I guess a happy child makes quality care"
4.Educational	School-like	"It's more school orientated"
	Play	"They learn a lot from general play"
	Teacher Educator	"...and the teacher is here"
	Mandated documents	"Based on the curriculum and the EYLF"

5.Staffing	Ratios	“...certain amount of kids per adult”
	Relationships	“The main thing, though, is the staff”
	Qualifications	“What sort of training do the staff have”

Findings are explored in this chapter under the master themes; however, it is important to recognise that these themes do not exist in isolation but, rather, they are connected to each other and form part of the larger narrative of participants’ constructs of quality education and care. The connection between themes will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Relational.

Evidenced across both of the participant groups was the notion that quality in a childcare service can be judged by a feeling – a feeling obtained when walking into a childcare service and experiencing the atmosphere. When asked to describe what this feeling was and what triggered it, participants often struggled to articulate particular factors; however, most went on to describe this feeling as being connected to the relationship between staff, parents and children.

The staff group initially responded to the question of how they recognise what quality is within a childcare service with phrases such as, “I suppose you can tell as soon as you walk in the door,” (Staff Member One) and you can tell by “the vibe going through the centre” (Staff Member Three). Staff Member Two explained that it is “atmosphere, basically, when you walk in and you see ... the children playing and laughing”. Staff Member Five made comments specifically on the quality at *Primary School A*, saying, “I just love the feel of this place...It’s a good feel”. Through the use of probing questions, the researcher encouraged participants to explicate what it was that triggered such feelings, resulting in comments related to relationships and communication. Staff Member Three attempted to describe the ‘vibe’ below:

It's pretty hard to explain but all the staff have said it here um...and even the parents as well, it's just a different vibe to a childcare centre. Quite often, you walk into childcare centres and you can hear the babies screaming up the other end of the hall and, you know, you can see the toddlers running around the room destroying toys and then you walk into the three year olds' room and you've got a big group of boys building and all the girls playing in the home corner where as here...we've just got more time for the, I guess, the one on one, you know, you walk in and there's an educator at each table...um...it's really hard to explain, just a different vibe.

Staff Member Three elaborated further, stating:

...and I think the relationships as well, between the staff, between the children, between the families. If that's not flowing and consistent then there is no care there in the first place...um...basically, the staff members straight away acknowledging a parent when they walk in a door...trying to involve the parents as much as possible in absolutely every aspect...I guess an open door policy as well as not making parents feel like they have to leave the centre as soon as they drop their child off.

The role of relationships in contributing to the notion of quality within a childcare service was confirmed by each of the other staff participants. Staff Member One emphasised the importance of having a sense of belonging within a centre, so that everyone felt welcomed. She explained that a quality childcare isn't just about looking after children, it is about creating a community of belonging. Staff Member Two expanded on this notion that providing a welcoming environment is a quality indicator and is related to "the communication with parents and children". In regards to parent communication, Staff Member Two commented "just letting them [parents] know how their [child's] day went...it builds a rapport with them". Staff Member Four explained that it is more than "saying hi and bye and that's it, but really having a good quality conversation about what their kids have been up to during the day and how they've been feeling...those kinds of things...keeping in good contact".

Staff Member Five reiterated the previous staff responses in her comments below:

I think if you can see that the children have a relationship with the adults...with the educators, that's really important...if that's lacking then there's something wrong with the centre, that's very important, relationship building between the child and also through the child and the teacher and the children with each other and also with the parents...I think the parents are really important part of raising children in the early childhood industry... Um, I think that also means strong relationships with families... I think that means a great team as in staff team...um...great communication between them...um I think more parent input...lots of parent input. We try and encourage that here but...I'd still like more. Um, what else?...the atmosphere still comes into it...if the atmosphere feels...like hmm high quality.

Results from the parent group followed a similar pattern, with participants initially responding with general comments related to the feel of the place as an indicator of quality and then leading into a conversation on the relationships they observed between their child/ren and the staff as well as their own relationship with individual staff members.

Parent Two remarked that "I just, yeah, I guess get a feel...a gut feel when you walk into a place...I feel like it's more individual". This 'gut feel', Parent Two described, is brought on by her relationship with the staff at the centre – "the staff seem really caring and, you know, and they're easy to talk to. If there's been a problem, they just don't hesitate to talk to me". Parent One made similar comments, "They [staff] genuinely seem quite caring...there's a conversation as soon as you walk in". Parent Four states that the staff "are friendly, they will talk to you about things, if there's even little concerns - I suppose they're all little concerns because it seems to me they address them before they become big issues".

Parent Five noted an observation of the way in which her child interacted with the staff as an indicator of quality. Parent Five remarked:

..I think it makes a big difference when the staff go down to the child's level and talk to them like they're own children, not you know like I hate my job I'm over it – they're not like that here. Every time you walk in there's a smiling face...it's just like a big family...there's no politics...everyone is just so open arms.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Environmental

The construct of quality as being related to the ability of the childcare provider to replicate aspects of 'homeliness' emerged predominately as a theme within the parent participant group; however, it was also evident within several of the staff interviews. This theme was identified from comments regarding the location of the centre as well as hygiene practices, safety and routines that reflected those that may occur if the child were at home. This identification of "homely stuff" largely came about from participants' attempts to explain the feeling they experienced within a centre, and so is closely related to the first master theme.

All five parent participants mentioned proximity as a leading factor in their choice of childcare provider. Parent One explained as follows:

Well, I guess it's to do with proximity as we only live down the road from there but also I did like that it was attached to the school...so when they progress into the school they're already used to it a bit rather than it being a shock to the system...yeah, so it was really about it being not so much of a daycare 'cause they're going to see other school children...

Whilst the parent participants all articulated a geographical dimension in that the centre was easily accessible and close to home, a metaphorical dimension also emerged as comments were raised surrounding aspects of the centre that were 'home-like'.

Parent One discussed the behavioural expectations at the centre and the way the staff responded to her child when he misbehaved. In doing so, Parent One stated that the expectations of the centre were similar to those set within her family; she stated, "it's just like it is at home". Parent One also made note of the importance of the routine in the centre, reflecting that which is already familiar to the child at home:

They might be a little more flexible, you know, in terms of if you said my child needs a nap at 10 in the morning whereas the nap time for the whole group might be 12.30 ...like the routine you've got at home, you could probably bring in.

Parent Two highlighted food policies and hygiene practices as indicators of quality also – “You know, if it looks dirty and nasty you wouldn't want to send your child there”.

Parent Two continued about the policy at *Primary School A* of providing healthy lunches from home:

They didn't do a lunch here where a lot of centres do lunch but here you send your child with lunch. At first I thought, oh this is a pain in the arse but, you know, at least I can send her with what she likes and you know what you are feeding them and you know who is preparing it and the hygiene there

Comparable comments were made by Parent Three. In her response to the interviewer's question regarding what she would look for in a quality childcare centre, Parent Three responded:

...that the kid's clean...hate to see the snotty dry noses when I come to pick them up, hate that, hate that...um...I've noticed here they're very good with hand hygiene...the centre is always clean when you come in, it's tidy...obviously you want all the safety aspects, like the gates in the play area, it's good for them.

Safety aspects were raised by Parent Three in response to this question also:

It seems like really good quality, the outside facilities that they have outside and, yeah, you know, different. The whole centre always looks very nice, looks good, and it's always clean and just, yep, looks good. It's nice for the kids to be able to play in and you know it's safe, it's sort of like they're all enclosed in a safe area so it's good.

In addition, Parent Five mentioned safety features as an indicator of quality. Parent Five remarked that she would consider the facilities and “If it's all closed in...it's not on any main roads”. Parent Five also emphasised the importance of the home routines being reflected in the centre, as stated below:

Oh, I mean as soon as my child runs in the morning...the first thing she does is run in and give her [educator] a cuddle and say 'is it our toast time?' Do you know what I mean?...like 'Have you had your toast yet this morning?' 'Cause they sit and have toast together like I would with my children in the morning and when I start work at 7am and I have to drop her off at 6am, you know, it's, I know as soon as she walks in she's having the same thing that she would have at home and she's sitting with an adult and she's having her morning breakfast and having a morning chat, you know, as you would in your own home setting...you know they actually sit down and have brekkie with them.

When questioned further on aspects of quality within childcare, Parent Five elaborated on the personal skills that she could see her child was learning and that these were skills she reinforced at home. In particular, Parent Five identified the "personal care...like the hand washing and the toileting and all that sort of stuff".

Whilst this theme was more prevalent within the Parent group, Staff did provide responses related to the 'home-like' nature of the centre as an indicator of quality. Staff Member Four responded that she would expect a quality service to do "things that kids would do at home, I guess, with most parents" and that it should look and feel "homely and comfortable". Staff Member Four elaborated further stating:

So for me in my, um, understanding of quality care it would be all of your high levels of hygiene...I guess that homely stuff again...kids feeling secure, um, staff really paying attention to the kids...making nappy changing a good time for the children, making sleep time a good time for the children...all those routines which can sometimes be a rush and a push to get done in the day but to make it interesting and enjoyable for the kids...

Staff Members Two and Three also made comments related to 'homeliness' in mentioning the emphasis that centres placed on healthy eating and hygiene practices as an indicator of quality.

Several of the participants mentioned, towards the end of the interview, when asked if there was anything else they would like to mention regarding indicators of quality, that they would take into account the resources within the childcare service. Comments made included, "You know, the environment, not really old, not very good stuff that

they have there...it would have to be sort of like nice stuff” (Parent Three) and that the service should have “nice play facilities” (Parent One). Staff Member Five stated, “I would expect some plants, a bit of nature inside, lot of lights um...high quality care...great toys but not plastic toys”.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Social Emotional.

In responding to the interviewer’s question regarding what participants looked for to affirm their choice of childcare employer/provider, responses illustrated that the child’s social emotional development or wellbeing was used to judge the quality of a centre. Staff participants made comments such as, “I would like to see the children...playing, having fun...so just to enjoy themselves” (Staff Member One) and “um..I would look at the children to see how happy they are and if they’re not happy then I’m not going to want to work there (Staff Member Two). Staff Member Four states, “I would be looking at the hands on experiences...where the kids are at...and where they’re enjoying themselves” and Staff Member Five explains that she would “look for happy children and things like that..I think happy engaged children”.

This theme was clearly identified within the responses gathered from the Parent participants also. All of the parents mentioned the feelings and/or opinions of their child as an indicator of quality within a childcare service. Parent One identified the ability of a centre to meet the needs of her child and provide a comfortable atmosphere. She stated:

...so I think if you could see a routine and a structure that’s working and that was age appropriate and they [staff] seemed to push them a little bit in terms of just taking them slightly out of their comfort zone and trying to guide them.

Parent Two is more explicit in her response stating:

I think quality here is my daughter is so happy to be here...she enjoys being here, she enjoys learning here, she loves coming home and telling me what she

did during the day of what she created...so I guess a happy child makes quality care.

When probed further regarding her child's feelings, Parent Two went on to say, "because sometimes I've had to pull some long days...and yep...she still comes home with a smile and she's, you know, happy enough."

Similarly, Parent Three commented:

...my daughter is also happy so when she comes home she tells me good positive things about the childcare centre and what good times she's had and, you know, sometimes she doesn't want to leave and wants to stay...When the child is quite young, they are not able to tell you but you're actually able to sense, sometimes they're actually crying, and clinging and not wanting to go...that was there in itself telling me something was going on.

In addition, Parent Four made comments regarding her child, explaining that "he's definitely very, very happy; I'm not seeing as many temper tantrums and things at home and I see my polite little boy coming back". Parent Four elaborated further, saying "he's happy, he's joined in really well. We are just getting him from being clingy when we get him...and he's interacting and all that so you can just tell, by the child, that he's happy".

Similarly, Parent Five remarked, "I just like any place where you can actually take a child and the child wants to go there and if your child doesn't want to go, then there's issues, obviously something's not going right." Parent Five explains:

...and children are good judges of character and I don't care what people say, you know, if someone, a child, is a great judge of character - if they really enjoy going somewhere, obviously it's a fantastic place to be, if they don't want to go then something's going wrong, they're not getting the attention that they need of they're not getting the care that they do need.

Identifying the social emotional dimension of the child as an indicator of quality was summarised succinctly by Parent Five when responding to what aspects of quality

would be taken into account to affirm her choice of childcare provider. Parent Five stated, “It’s my main thing, you come here, the child loves it, I love it and I feel comfortable, I can go to work knowing my child is in safe hands.”

4.1.4 Theme 4: Educational.

Each of the participants, within both groups, made comment on the educational aspect of the childcare service as being related to quality. Within this ‘educational’ theme, a broad range of indicators were mentioned such as the centre being ‘school-like’, the inclusion of play, and the use of mandated documents to guide practice.

Within the ‘educational’ master theme, the sub-theme of the centre being ‘school-like’ was a consistent statement from participants.

Staff Member Two explained:

My main reason is that my son goes to the school...and I like the fact that it’s more school orientated at this day care where all the day cares I have worked at um...are pretty much for um...do as you like, there’s no structure or anything like that and it’s not preparing them for school”

When probed further regarding her reasons for thinking this centre was ‘more school orientated’, Staff Member Two elaborated that it was due to “the programming and the Magical Moments”. Magical Moments were explained as a reporting technique whereby educators recorded the daily activities of the children with photos and anecdotes for parents to view at drop off and pick up times.

Staff Member Three also made note of the link between childcare and the school, explaining that she had previously worked for a “big company and just got no recognition, no nothing, it was just money, money, money, money...it’s just a different environment here...you know, we’re working under the Catholic Education

department so we've got better resources, we've got better staff ratios...". Staff Member Three also added that a reason for seeking employment at this particular centre was that "this school had a good reputation".

Similarly, Staff Member Five remarked on the unique arrangement of school based childcare, stating that:

I've worked in the industry for about 30 years in early childhood, and I've never worked in a centre that was attached to a school and I thought that community feel would be a great way um to...I don't know...I just think I was looking forward to working as a community rather than just a small separate... like every other centre I've worked at has been separate it's not been attached to anything so um I just thought that um a community feel like this would have more to offer for the children and also for the children in this section go onto the next lot and so on so they've all got their little friendships forming at an early age and they go through the whole years with their children with their friendships so hopefully that..yeah.

These statements by staff provide close connections to earlier themes; in particular, reference is frequently made on the 'school-like' nature and the 'homely stuff' as is evidenced in the above quote. This connection is also seen within the responses from the Parent group.

Parent One explained that, as the childcare is attached to a school, she preferred the "structure that comes with it...he [her son] sees the same teacher from the kindy and the pre-primary...there's just a little more familiarity."

Parent Three provided a similar response, also preferring that the childcare centre was attached to the school, which her oldest child had attended. Parent Three had experienced other childcare providers, and often referred to previous experiences to explain her reasons for choosing *Primary School A*. In doing so, Parent Three noted the social benefits for her child in transitioning into the school environment, stating "...they're used to the same kids who will be in their class and they're used to those children rather than having other kids who have already got friendships elsewhere."

A second sub-theme that emerged regarding the 'educational' dimension of quality related to aspects of programming, including the place of play in the centre.

Programming was interpreted by participants to be the planning of the curriculum, consisting of the content taught and the experiences provided for the children. Within the Staff group, particular focus appeared to be placed on having a shared philosophy regarding play and structure within a centre. Staff Member One responded that:

Um...all the children are you know necessarily hands-on busy like they're not doing drawing, they're not doing painting um...because they learn a lot from general play, socially you know, cognitively. I suppose I would be looking at what they [a service] are offering like you know, the programming side of things...um variety of choice, areas set up and things like that...

The expectation to see programming was reiterated by Staff Member Two who also went on to describe what a quality service would offer:

I would expect them to see a little bit more structure as like I said here, getting them ready for school - because at the moment, you know, most daycares, they just let them do what they like, which is fine, you know it's all child orientated but it's not really preparing them for when they go to school...

Staff Members Three and Four made comparable comments with statements about the hands-on and free-flowing set-up of activities within a quality centre. Staff Member Three explained quality education as:

I guess walking into a centre and being able to see that they're learning their shapes, letters... you know, all the general sort of stuff, but also the extra stuff they just don't get by just going to a child care centre and just playing with blocks, you know, it's just got to be more than just playing with the toys that are being provided, it's sort of extending on everything...

Staff Member Three explained that having a qualified teacher also enhanced the educational quality of the centre stating:

Obviously, we've got the educational program running...we have a free flowing um...kind of philosophy where the children get to choose what they want to do but at the same time it's sort of guided by us...

Comments about choice of activities are also made by Staff Member Four, who responded that she would be "looking at the hands-on experiences" and "not everyone sitting down doing the same thing" as a construct of quality.

The use of the mandated Early Years Learning Framework emerged only through the interview with Staff Member Five. Staff Member Five stated that the use of the document in a centre was an indicator of quality practice:

Based on the curriculum and the EYLF...um...and I think the EYLF is awesome. I like the EYLF, especially for the young ones, 'cause I think it takes... belonging, being and becoming is just so amazing. I mean, we've always tried to do that anyways but now it's actually in there as a curriculum standard and it's actually really good so I think that's important that everyone embraces that.

In regards to how quality education within childcare could be observed, Staff Member Five explained that in conjunction with the EYLF, she would expect the program to be based on the interests of the child and for the environment to "be set up so that the children can actually engage themselves independently."

The Parent group clearly articulated that a structured 'school-like' environment was a desirable feature in a quality childcare centre. The Parent group commented particularly on this aspect within the 'educational' theme that was identified, with some also stating that the inclusion of a teacher was a quality indicator. Parent One stated, "I guess it would be whether it's got the structure of...this is what we're doing...of the outcomes...this is what we're going to try to do today and what we're looking for with progress..." Parent One explained that having the current centre attached to the school improved quality, elaborating as follows:

I think the focus [at the centre] has been on trying to get my child socialised and introducing him to the structure, so it's not you go to kindy and it's a shock that they won't be necessarily doing what you want all the time and...well...learning to be with the whole group...yeah..It's like if you go to the standard childcare, they're there to have a good time, they're there to get looked after, but it's not so much about preparing for kindy...

Parents Three and Five discussed the relationship of a childcare centre to a school as improving quality. Both made comments such as "it's a nice transition" (Parent Five) into the school system for the child and "I think also being able to see the other kids who are in the, sort of like the kindy, next door" (Parent Three).

Parent Two and Parent Four focussed on the employment of a qualified teacher; however, they both also mentioned the school-like structure and use of curriculum documents when describing a quality service. Parent Two reported that she "like[d] the kind of pre-school structure in a way because they have some more education as well of just sending the kids constantly outside to play in the sandpit" and Parent Four explained that she would "like all centres to have a teacher...I would like to see the teacher's timetable". Parent Four elaborated:

Um...because they have a teacher based here, pretty much, um...and I just like their morals and things...this particular one was because of, well, just the staff are friendly...and what they offer them and the teacher is here, like I said.

In regards to curriculum documents, Parent Two stated that the use of some kind of early learning framework was beneficial and Parent Four mentioned that from her experience in the UK, she would like to see "the same sort of standards" as are in place there, such as compulsory kindergarten and the use of a curriculum.

Parent Five shared a comparable response, stating that:

Basically, they were really good with the days that I wanted...um... and also they've got a 3 year old kindy in place as well so they've actually got a teacher during the school hours which I think is fantastic, as opposed to a daycare

where they don't have an actual school teacher doing school work, sort of thing, and training them for the next step at school.

Each of the parent participants made some reference to the progress or learning they saw occurring for their child as a sign that a centre was providing a quality service. When asked by the interviewer to describe how a judgement was made on their child's progress, responses gathered included statements such as, "the teachings...I mean she can write her name now, which is fantastic, and things like that so she is learning while she is here - it's not just coming and playing" (Parent Five). Parent Four remarked, "I can see if he's learning and if he's coming home with different aspects and talking to me about little things...um... yeah I can see he's coming on". Parent One made similar comments referring to the pieces of work that her child brought home and stating that she would see "4 or 5 pictures from say the last few weeks and you'd be able to see the progress".

4.1.5 Theme 5: Staffing.

Throughout the interview process, the identification of staff as an indicator of quality was a consistent theme. In response to most interview questions, some aspects related to the staff at the centre emerged and this was evident across both participant groups. As mentioned previously, participants identified the communication and relationship with staff as the key contributor to the 'feel' of a place and in determining if a centre was providing quality education and care. Within this theme, factors that were identified regarding the staff included the ratio of staff to children, the qualifications of staff and their length of employment at the centre.

The ratio of staff to children at a childcare service was mentioned only by Staff Member Three, who responded to the question regarding what she would look for in a quality childcare service by stating, "So I would be like...how long have the staff been here, what are their qualifications, what's the ratio?" Staff Members One and Two also made note of the other factors mentioned by Staff Member Three regarding staff

qualifications and length of employment. Staff Member One responded that she would consider “training...what sort of training do the staff have and um...and where they actually got their training” and “yeah..a lot of the staff doing further qualifications” as well. Staff Member Two remarked that she would like to “know their qualifications” and would expect to see the qualifications of all of the carers displayed at the centre as an indicator of quality.

Staff Member Three elaborated in detail regarding the relationship between quality and the staff at a centre, stating:

Quality care to me would be the staff, who have been in it for a long time, and are in it for the right reasons. You walk into so many centres and these 16 year old girls, covered in makeup, who are just there out of school because they don't know what else to do, um, you know, let's face it this isn't a job we do for the money and I think the people that are in it for a long time do realise that this is a job you have to be passionate about so that would um...kind of link up to the quality care...

Responses gathered from the parent group were also clear in identifying aspects such as ratios of staff and their qualifications in constructing ideas on quality education and care. Parent Three made the following comment regarding ratios:

I'd say the ratio of the people that are the carer to the children, yep, that would probably be an important thing otherwise if they've got lots of children and one person then they're not obviously going to provide the high quality.

Similarly, Parent Five raises the number of adults per child as a sign of quality. Parent Five states that she “would expect to have a certain amount of kids per adult or, um, helper” and goes on to explain further – “I'd expect enough people to be there for the children, you know, not just one or two adults to 20 odd kids you know...and a teacher”.

The qualifications and training of the staff were also key factors raised by the parent group. Comments emerged such as, “You would like to see the staff have been trained” (Parent Three) and “I guess you would look at the training, see where their

people are, you know what type, have they had advanced training or not, their child certificates” (Parent Two). Parent One remarked that she would “...probably expect to see more staff qualified than just childcare workers...you know, I don’t know what you’d call them – early learning teachers” employed in a quality childcare provider.

The length of time at a centre and experience in the childcare field were also a consideration. Parent Three responded:

I think it would mainly be those things, seeing the qualifications are there and the staff have been there for a while or they are going to be the staff that are going to be there for a while rather than changing over very quickly...turn over of staff, high turnover of staff, would not be a good thing.

Parent Four responded with similar remarks stating that a consideration of quality was “the length of time some of the staff had been there” and elaborating that “experience counts for a hell of a lot”.

4.2 Additional Findings

Whilst the themes that were identified from the interview process provided a framework for reporting the factors used to construct quality within each of the stakeholder groups, an additional finding relating more specifically to the structure of the interviews for the participant groups is worth noting. Evident in all interviews, across both participant groups, was the focus on quality care as opposed to education. A distinction can be made here as, in response to the first interview question regarding choice of childcare, participants frequently elaborated on aspects of education, in particular mentioning the employment of a teacher. When participants were asked by the interviewer what they would expect from a childcare provider offering high quality education and care, both groups elaborated on aspects of quality care. Consistently, participants required probing questions such as, “aside from aspects of care, what else would you consider?”, in order to elaborate on aspects of education.

4.3 Bracketing and the Researcher Journal

In acknowledging that the researcher worked within the early childhood education sector, a journal was used for the process of bracketing. The journal assisted in Stage 5 of Bednall's (2006) data analysis. In this stage, information that had been collected in the journal, such as the researcher's interpretation of quality at *Primary School A* and knowledge of the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b), was revisited to see if it could inform the interpretation of the themes. As comments made in the journal were based on the researcher's assumptions of quality, these remained 'bracketed' from the participants' responses in an attempt to minimise bias when interpreting the interview data.

4.4 Chapter Summary

Findings from the interview data were interpreted through the process of IPA, resulting in the drawing out of a number of master themes, namely; relational, environmental, social emotional, education and staffing. The sub-themes within these tell the story of the participants and articulate their perspectives on quality education and care within childcare. The themes that were identified are largely interconnected and the following chapter will investigate the relationship that exists between these themes, as Stage 6: 'Fashioning the unity of the study' of Bednall's (2006) steps in IPA suggests. Chapter Six: Discussion will also examine these themes in relation to the research questions that have led the investigation and in doing so, will draw on findings from existing literature.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The dichotomy that has historically existed between 'education' and 'care' has been bridged with the introduction of school based childcare within Western Australia. This new phenomenon, led by developments in research indicating that high quality integrated services are needed in order to improve long term outcomes for children, has led to the Catholic Education Office in Western Australia introducing Long Day Care centres attached to school sites. In investigating the constructs of quality childcare held by stakeholders at a local contextualised level, *Primary School A* was selected for this present study. This investigation has sought to add to the limited research evidence that currently exists on the new phenomenon of school based childcare.

In undertaking this investigation, IPA was chosen as the most suitable method, allowing the researcher to gain an insight into the experience of the participants and to then interpret their narrative to represent their constructs of quality childcare. IPA, as a phenomenological approach aims to "focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live and what this means to them" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4). In the context of this investigation, the experience of quality within childcare was explored. In utilising IPA as the approach to research, it is understood that a "double hermeneutic" exists (Smith, 2004, p. 40). When discussing the themes that were identified from participants' responses, it is necessary to reiterate that this process is the researcher trying to make sense of the participant's attempt to make sense of their experience (Smith, 2004).

As explained in Chapter Three: Research Approach and Design, Smith (2004) describes three characteristic features of IPA: idiographic, inductive and interrogative. These three characteristics were evident in this study. As idiographic, this study comprised

detailed focus and analysis of a small sample of stakeholders at *Primary School A*. As an inductive method, themes emerged out of the data, during the stages of data analysis. As an interrogative process, the researcher utilised a research journal and made use of bracketing to minimise personal bias.

In the previous chapter, participants' responses were reported within the master themes that were identified. These themes were identified through Bednall's (2006) stages of data analysis. In utilising Bednall's (2006) framework, transcripts were revisited on several occasions and bracketed information was considered. Of particular significance, the researcher's preconceptions about quality and personal knowledge of the standards in the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b) remained bracketed to ensure this information did not influence the themes that were identified.

This current chapter will seek to relate the themes identified in the findings, to the overarching research questions that have guided this investigation, namely:

1. How is 'quality education and care within childcare' described by individuals from various stakeholder groups?
2. How do stakeholders' perspectives of quality childcare align with the *National Quality Standard*?

In doing so, it will also be necessary to explore the relationship between the findings and the extant literature.

5.2 Findings

As explained, the narratives obtained from participants through the interview process were analysed using Bednall's (2006) six stages of IPA, and, rather than distinct themes emerging from this process according to stakeholder group, the themes that were identified were evidenced across both the parent and staff groups. The five master

themes identified within the Chapter Four will be discussed in responding to the first research question driving this study, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

How is 'quality education and care in childcare' defined by individuals from various stakeholder groups?

5.2.1 Theme 1: Relational.

Taylor (2009) emphasised the "...critical importance of relationships and interactions as fundamentals driving...quality programs and shaping the kinds of outcomes demonstrated by programs" (p. 5), a statement that resounds with the findings of this present study. The definition of quality education and care as related to relationships was a master theme identified through the conversations with participants.

Statements regarding the interactions and 'vibe' that existed between parents and staff and those observed between staff and children were central to this theme. The development of this theme largely transpired in response to the first interview question, which focussed on staff members' and parents' reasons for choosing *Primary School A* as either their place of employment or as a service for their child. Whilst responses initially attempted to describe a feeling, once probed, the participants went on to describe the relationships within the service as an identifier of quality.

For the parent group, describing what it was about the relationships that specifically related to their construction of quality, raised comments regarding the staff member knowing their child. Responses referred to staff being able to greet them and their child, to report back about their child's day and to speak to their child as if they were their own. From a staff viewpoint, comments explicated the importance of having family involvement within the centre and engaging in regular communication with them. Comments from both participant groups referred to the ability of the centre to create a sense of belonging through relationships. *Belonging, Being and Becoming* are the three themes of the Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009d), a key component of the National Quality Agenda. The Early Years Learning Framework

(COAG, 2009d) states that, “*belonging* acknowledges children’s interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging” (p. 7).

Figure 5.1 illustrates *Belonging*, *Being* and *Becoming* as three points of a triangle. Each of the themes is situated on the triangle in relation to its connection with the Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009d) themes. The ‘relational’ theme, in this investigation, is identified as aligning closely with the Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009d) theme of *Belonging*. The ‘social-emotional’ theme has been placed between *Being* and *Belonging* as it was found to align with both themes. The ‘environmental’ theme was illustrated as more closely aligned to *Being*. On the other side of the triangle, the ‘educational’ theme that was evident in this research was seen to align with the features of *Becoming* within the Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009d). The theme ‘staffing’ was positioned at the centre of the diagram, as characteristics of this theme resonated with all three; *Belonging*, *Being* and *Becoming*.

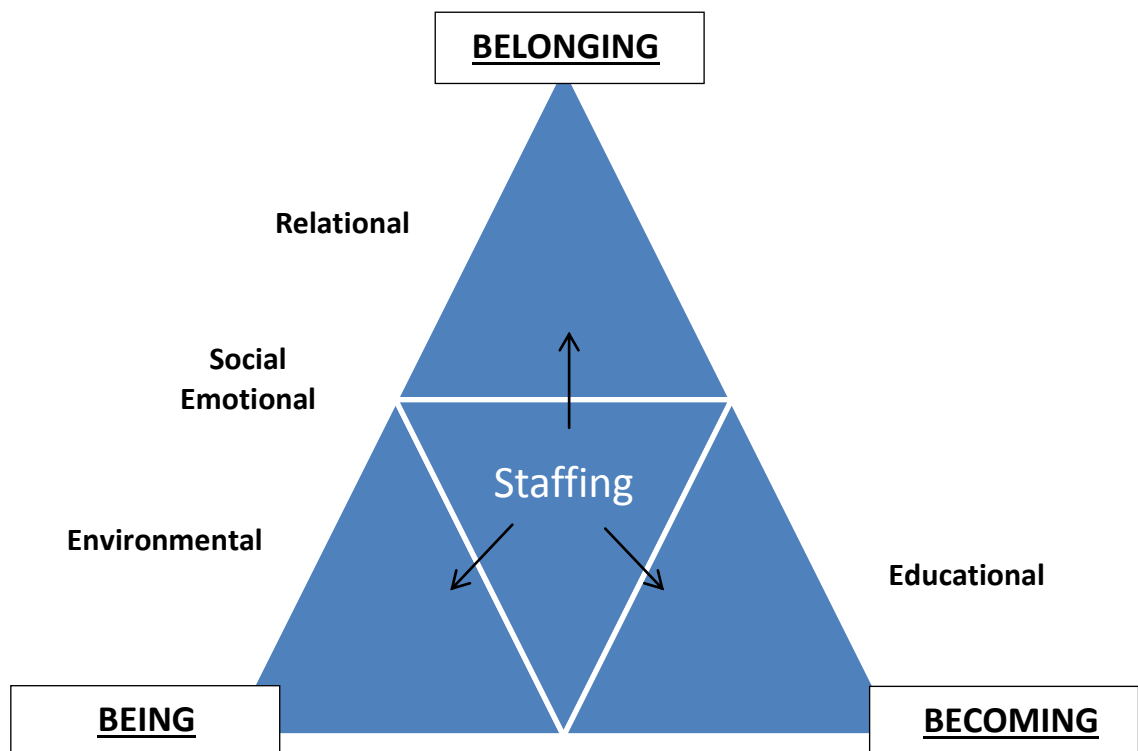


Figure 5.1. Relationship of master themes to the themes of the Early Years Learning Framework

The connection between relational aspects of a service and definitions of quality resonates with existing research findings. Boyd, Tayler and Thorpe (2010) also found that relational aspects of care were a predominant factor in childcare quality. In particular, Boyd, Tayler and Thorpe (2010) reported that parents viewed the development of positive relationships between their child and carers and ensuring their child's needs were being met, as key indicators of a quality service. Similar results were reported by da Silva and Wise (2006), when parents' perspectives of quality, with a focus on cultural competencies of staff, were investigated.

In relation to the existing tools for making judgements of quality in childcare, a strong connection can be made between quality being interpreted through relationships, as evidenced in this present study, to the results described from the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) longitudinal research. The EPPE study identified one of five areas of quality as the interactions that occur between staff and children (Sylva et al, 2003). Similarly, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R) included 'interactions' as a key feature in judging quality childcare (Mashburn et al, 2008). Both of these tools that assist with the assessment of quality therefore include aspects of relationships as an identifier of quality.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Environmental.

Participants frequently referred to environmental aspects when explaining identifiers of quality in childcare. This theme consisted of a wide variety of elements including the location of the centre, in particular the proximity to the home, as well as hygiene practices, safety factors, routines and the resources available. In drawing out responses from participants to further explain comments that emerged regarding quality indicators, it was evident that the elements mentioned above were concerned with the ability of the centre to replicate aspects and routines of the home. Frequently, participants made reference to an aspect of the centre, such as a routine, being conducted "...as you would in your own home setting" (Parent Five). Parent One remarked that a quality centre offered routines that are similar to those in the home, and Staff Member Four commented that quality was related to "...that homely stuff".

Safety factors and the resources available at the centre became apparent through statements such as “...it’s sort of like they’re all enclosed in a safe area, so it’s good” (Parent Three) and “nice play facilities” (Parent One).

The elements of the ‘environmental’ theme that emerged in this investigation are common amongst existing research on quality perspectives within a childcare setting. Most significantly, the environmental elements identified by participants form a part of each of the assessment tools elaborated within the Literature Review Chapter, namely: ECERS-R (Mashburn et al. 2008), CLASS (Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2007) and the EPPE Project (Sylva et al. 2003). Each of these tools for quality assessment refers to the equipment within the centre, the procedures in place for maintaining high standards of hygiene and the consistency of routines in place for the children. Within this investigation, participants largely focused on the environmental aspects of routines and practices, whereas comparatively, the assessment tools largely judge safety equipment and physical resources.

Environmental factors can also be related to the themes in The Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009d). As the previous theme identified in this investigation, ‘relational’, can be viewed to be about *Belonging*, the environmental factors raised by participants can be linked to both *Belonging* and *Being*.

Being recognises the significance of the here and now in children’s lives. It is about the present and them knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life’s joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life. The early childhood years are not solely preparation for the future but also about the present (COAG, 2009d, p. 7).

In connecting to *Belonging, Being and Becoming*, it is possible to view the five themes that were identified in this research as connected (illustrated in Figure 5.1).

5.2.3 Theme 3: Social Emotional.

Central to this theme was the acknowledgement by parents and staff that the wellbeing of the child was a prominent factor in considering quality within education and care. The articulation that the views of the child, and their emotional response to attending the service, were an important consideration of both stakeholder groups was congruent with existing literature. Ceglowski (2004) determined that childcare quality is deemed to be about what is good for the child, for their whole development, and so can be broadly framed within this 'social emotional' theme that was identified in the present study. For example, participants in this investigation made statements such as "I just like any place where you can actually take a child and the child wants to go there" (Parent Five) and "I would look at the children to see how happy they are" (Staff Member One).

Smith (1999) explained that a major ingredient of the ability to provide for quality in childcare services was the people and the relationships that exist between staff and children, a conclusion that can also be drawn in this study. The connection between the 'social emotional' theme, to those discussed previously, is brought into focus. The identification of quality as connected to the wellbeing of the child and at the same time as being impacted by the relationships that exist in the service is illustrated in Figure 5.1. Figure 5.1 shows not only the connected nature of the themes, but also their connection to the Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009d). The ability of staff to meet the emotional needs of the children and for the children to demonstrate that they are happy to be at the service, described by parents as the willingness of their child to attend, largely indicated that the social emotional state of the child was central to how definitions of quality were constructed.

The concept that quality can be determined through the social emotional development of the child can be linked to the findings of Brownlee, Berthelsen and Segaran (2009) who expounded a major theme within their results as '*affective dimensions of quality care*'. Similarly, Brownlee et al. (2009) report participants from their study making statements that align with those of this present investigation regarding the ability of a

centre to create positive relationships with the children and for the children to be responsive to these.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Educational.

Aspects of quality judged as 'educational' were most commonly drawn from probing questions, as participants within both stakeholder groups tended to focus largely on aspects related to care. However, whilst probing was required, it was clearly evident that educational aspects were considered to be aligned with quality. A variety of factors emerged within this theme, including the service being 'school-like'.

Notably, staff and parents made comparable statements regarding the ability of the service to provide a smooth transition into the school system. Parent One remarked, "There's just a little more familiarity," as children move between the childcare service into the school environment and Staff Member Five discussed the smooth transition it provides for children as they form relationships with other staff and children. The identification of smooth transitions into the school context, as part of this theme, links with all three previously discussed themes of 'relational', 'environmental' and 'social emotional'. The wellbeing of the children, the relationships they have with their carers and the proximity of the centre to the school, were regularly integrated in participants' responses. The educational theme identified in this investigation also aligns with the Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009d) theme of *Becoming*, as illustrate in Figure 5.1 (page 61). *Becoming* emphasises the ability of children to grow, change and learn, and is therefore focussed on educational characteristics.

Tools developed to assess quality within education and care all include educational aspects, such as program development and structure. The CLASS and ECERS-R identify these educational indicators as 'program structure' and 'management', respectively. Within these categories, the CLASS and ECERS-R tools can be utilised to assess the quality of services through the examination of the educational teaching and learning program, variety of experiences and general management of the age groups.

Comments surrounding the structure of the program within the centre, as well as the inclusion of play, use of mandated documents and the employment of a teacher qualified educator were also recurrent when participants explained the centre's school-like nature. The naming of the Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009d) was only identified by one staff member and one parent, although several participants made reference to the achievement of outcomes and the desire to have the learning and development that was occurring for their child assessed in some way. Several parent participants made note of feedback processes, such as seeing photos of their child and reading descriptions of their child's activities. These processes of reporting on their child's learning were viewed positively and were interpreted as a characteristic of quality.

Within the educational theme that emerged, of particular significance was the introduction of a teacher educator within childcare. Responses on the subject of teachers in childcare were frequently gained in response to the first interview question regarding reasons for choosing a particular service. The employment of a qualified teacher was viewed as an indicator of quality, and therefore childcare choice, and was interpreted by the parent group as resulting in a quality educational program at the centre.

5.2.5 Theme 5: Staffing.

The connection between characteristics of staff and quality education and care was raised by participants in response to most interview questions. As previously discussed, aspects concerned with the relational nature of staff and their interactions with parents and children were frequently raised. Within the 'staffing' theme, elements surrounding the staff-child ratio, qualifications of staff and their length of employment were central.

Literature on staff-child ratios and qualifications is indicative that these two aspects are essential features of a quality service. Layzer and Goodson (2006) point out that, "caregiver characteristics are perhaps the most important influence shaping a child's

day-to day experience” (p. 561), presenting the finding that “qualifications of early childhood staff – experience, training, and formal education – are believed to increase the probability of competence and thus to affect the quality of the child’s experience” (p. 561). Participants across both groups in the present study raised similar remarks. Staff Member Three commented, “So I would be like... how long have the staff been here, what are their qualifications, what’s the ratio?” Parent Three made a similar remark:

I’d say the ratio of the people that are the carers to the children, yep, that would probably be an important thing, otherwise if they’ve got lots of children and one person then they’re not obviously going to provide the high quality.

For the parent group in particular, the length of time staff members had been employed at a particular service and their experience in the childcare sector was a key consideration. Parent Four iterated that “...the length of time some of the staff had been there” was a factor, and stated that, “experience counts for a hell of a lot”.

With reference to Figure 5.1, ‘staffing’ is illustrated as connected to *Belonging, Being and Becoming* (COAG, 2009d). Participants identified the central role that staff played in developing relationships and assisting in their children’s social and emotional development (*Belonging and Being*), in providing the environment (*Belonging and Being*) and in educational aspects of the centre (*Becoming*).

With reference to existing tools for assessing quality, staff qualifications and child-staff ratios are widely evident (ECERS-R; CLASS; EPPE); however, reference to length of time at a centre and overall experience in the field of childcare is less explicit. Previously conducted studies indicate that continuity of staff is related to quality constructs (Layzer & Goodson, 2006) and it was clearly a consideration for participants within this investigation; however, it does not feature as a part of existing assessment tools.

5.3 Interpretations

The perspectives of the five staff and five parents interviewed within this investigation into constructs of quality education and care have resulted in the development of the following themes: *relational, environmental, social emotional, educational* and *staffing*. The five master themes identified have been discussed in relation to extant literature, including the Early Years Learning Framework: *Belonging, Being* and *Becoming* (COAG, 2009d). When the five themes identified in this investigation are considered as inter-related, a holistic view of the narrative as told by the participants can be interpreted. Figure 5.2, below, illustrates that the themes identified in this investigation can be presented as ‘home-like’ and/or ‘school-like’, with school based childcare being viewed as a stepping stone between these two distinct, yet complimentary, characteristics of quality education and care. The master themes ‘social-emotional’ and ‘environmental’ are illustrated on the diagram as being characteristics of both the home and the school context. The ‘relational’ theme is viewed as being concerned with the connection between home and school based childcare whilst the ‘staffing’ theme connected the school based childcare to the school context. The ‘educational’ theme also connected features of the school based childcare to the school.

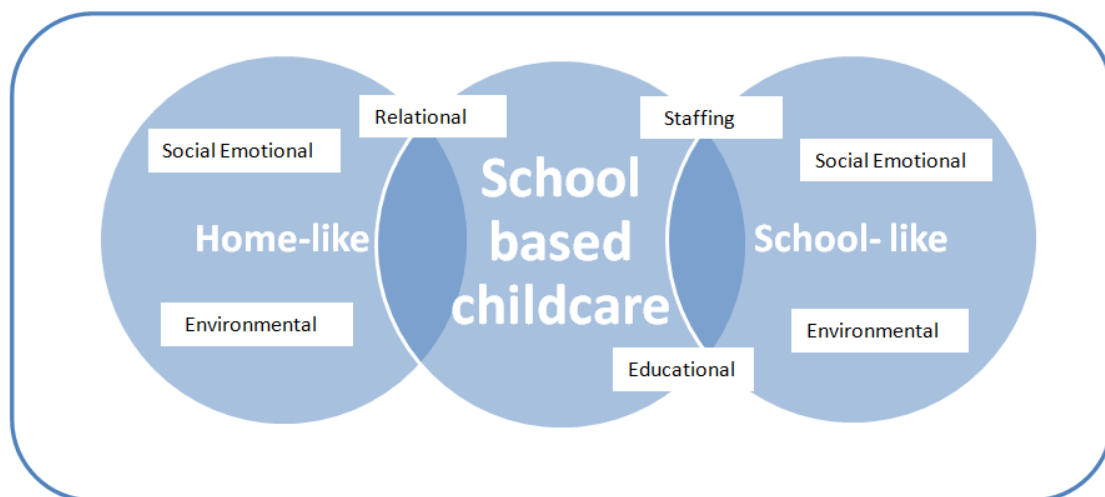


Figure 5.2. Relationship of the master themes to the characteristics of quality school based childcare

5.3.1 Home-like.

The identification across the themes that quality education and care is likened to the 'home', was a recurring concept during the analysis process. Participants in both the staff and parent groups made comments surrounding the home-like nature of a service when describing a quality childcare provider. These comments arose within the *relational* theme as parent participants made remarks such as, "It's just like a big family," (Parent Five) and in describing that an indicator of quality was when staff spoke to their child as if they were their own. Connections to the 'home' were also found within the *environmental* and *social emotional* themes as participants articulated that a quality centre aimed to provide a welcoming atmosphere that provided consistency for the child through the replication of routines established in the home. Both parents and staff made explicit statements regarding their construction of quality education and care within childcare to be directly linked to the ability of the centre to provide a home-like atmosphere.

5.3.2 School-like.

In contrast to this, the concept that quality education and care is characterised by the ability of a centre to provide a smooth transition into the schooling system, in essence, to be 'school-like', was also identified. Parents and staff repeatedly made reference within the *environmental*, *social emotional*, *educational* and *staffing* themes that aspects of the school system such as teaching a set program of work, implementing structured routines and the proximity of the centre to the school were indicators of quality education and care. For the parent group, the opportunity for their child to observe other children in the school environment and to transition from one context to the next with familiar staff and children, was a notable construct of quality.

To understand quality education and care as simultaneously 'home-like' and 'school-like' may appear paradoxical. However, when considered theoretically, these two somewhat contradictory terms can provide a foundation for viewing the new

phenomena of school based childcare as a stepping stone between the centre and the school. If school based childcare is perceived as providing the security and comfort of the home, and, at the same time, offering the educational aims and structure of the school system, these two distinct perspectives can be viewed as complimentary.

Stakeholder constructs of quality education and care, within this study, have resulted in the development of concept that quality childcare is simultaneously 'home-like' and 'school-like'. With this response to the initial research question, it is possible to investigate how these stakeholder constructs relate to a key policy document, the *National Quality Standard*, and to therefore address the second research question driving this study.

5.4 How do stakeholders' perspectives of quality provision align with the *National Quality Standard*?

The *National Quality Standard* (COAG, 2009b) is a COAG initiative, forming part of a larger policy ensemble referred to as the National Quality Agenda. The National Quality Agenda responded to data gathered during the OECD's research in 2006, reported in their paper titled, '*Starting Strong II*'. This paper clearly identified a need for Australia to invest in the early years in order to improve long term outcomes for children. These outcomes were concerned with providing a competent workforce for the future which would sustain, rather than deplete, national Government services. The OECD's (2006) research, in comparing the economic input and output of countries internationally, highlighted the need for the Australian Government to invest in the early years. Raising quality standards within the education and care sectors, through a National Quality Agenda, was COAG's response to the '*Starting Strong II*' report.

The National Quality Agenda consists of the following:

- i. National Quality Standard (incorporating the EYLF)
- ii. National Quality Framework incorporating the NQS and its ratings system
- iii. the new national regulatory system
- iv. the new national body (ACECQA)

Of particular interest in this investigation is the *National Quality Standard (NQS)* (COAG, 2009b), and the ways in which stakeholder constructs align with the standards of quality set out in this mandated document. The *NQS*, implemented in 2012, is currently being used as a tool to assess the quality of childcare services that provide for the care and education of children aged 0-5 years of age, irrespective of whether the centre operates at a school site. As such, school based childcare can also expect to be rated against the criteria identified in the *NQS*.

Standards within the *NQS* can be separated into two categories: process quality and structural quality. These two forms are evident across extant literature in the field and previous empirical studies frame quality within these terms. Structural quality refers to aspects that can be observed and regulated and includes elements such as the qualifications of staff, child to staff ratios and the physical environment (Tayler, Wills, Hayden & Wilson, 2006). In comparison, process quality pertains to the educational program, routines and management strategies as well as the quality of the relationships and interactions that develop between staff, children and families (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002; Tayler, Wills, Hayden & Wilson, 2006). The Standards articulated within the *NQS* are listed in Table 5 below and will be discussed in relation to the findings from this present study within the framework of process and structural quality.

Table 5.1

National Quality Standard: quality areas, standards and elements

QA1	Educational program and practice
1.1	An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child's learning and development.
1.1.1	Curriculum decision making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.
1.1.2	Each child's current knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program.
1.1.3	The program, including routines, is organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning.
1.1.4	The documentation about each child's program and progress is available to families.
1.1.5	Every child is supported to participate in the program.
1.1.6	Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and influence events and their world.
1.2	Educators and co-ordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child.
1.2.1	Each child's learning and development is assessed as part of an ongoing cycle of planning, documenting and evaluation.
1.2.2	Educators respond to children's ideas and play and use intentional teaching to scaffold and extend each child's learning.
1.2.3	Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, is regularly used to implement the program.
QA2	Children's health and safety
2.1	Each child's health is promoted.
2.1.1	Each child's health needs are supported.
2.1.2	Each child's comfort is provided for and there are appropriate opportunities to meet each child's need for sleep, rest and relaxation.
2.1.3	Effective hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.

2.1.4	Steps are taken to control the spread of infectious diseases and to manage injuries and illness, in accordance with recognised guidelines.
2.2	Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the program for children.
2.2.1	Healthy eating is promoted and food and drinks provided by the service are nutritious and appropriate for each child.
2.2.2	Physical activity is promoted through planned and spontaneous experiences and is appropriate for each child.
2.3	Each child is protected.
2.3.1	Children are adequately supervised at all times.
2.3.2	Every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and any hazard likely to cause injury.
2.3.3	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented.
2.3.4	Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are aware of their roles and responsibilities to respond to every child at risk of abuse or neglect.
QA3	Physical environment
3.1	The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service.
3.1.1	Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are suitable for their purpose.
3.1.2	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.
3.1.3	Facilities are designed or adapted to ensure access and participation by every child in the service and to allow flexible use, and interaction between indoor and outdoor space.
3.2	The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play.
3.2.1	Outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.
3.2.2	Resources, materials and equipment are sufficient in number, organised in ways that ensure appropriate and effective implementation of the program and allow for multiple uses.
3.3	The service takes an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future.
3.3.1	Sustainable practices are embedded in service operations.
3.3.2	Children are supported to become environmentally responsible and show respect for the environment.
QA4	Staffing arrangements
4.1	Staffing arrangements enhance children's learning and development and ensure their safety and wellbeing.
4.1.1	Educator-to-child ratios and qualification requirements are maintained at all times.
4.2	Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are respectful and ethical.
4.2.1	Professional standards guide practice, interactions and relationships.
4.2.2	Educators, co-ordinators and staff members work collaboratively and affirm, challenge, support and learn from each other to further develop their skills, to improve practice and relationships.
4.2.3	Interactions convey mutual respect, equity and recognition of each other's strengths and skills.
QA5	Relationships with children
5.1	Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.
5.1.1	Interactions with each child are warm, responsive and build trusting relationships.
5.1.2	Every child is able to engage with educators in meaningful, open interactions that support the acquisition of skills for life and learning.
5.1.3	Each child is supported to feel secure, confident and included.
5.2	Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.
5.2.1	Each child is supported to work with, learn from and help others through collaborative learning opportunities.
5.2.2	Each child is supported to manage their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.
5.2.3	The dignity and rights of every child are maintained at all times.
QA6	Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
6.1	Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.
6.1.1	There is an effective enrolment and orientation process for families.
6.1.2	Families have opportunities to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions.
6.1.3	Current information about the service is available to families.
6.2	Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.
6.2.1	The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child's learning and wellbeing.
6.2.2	Current information is available to families about community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.
6.3	The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children's learning and wellbeing.
6.3.1	Links with relevant community and support agencies are established and maintained.
6.3.2	Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.
6.3.3	Access to inclusion and support assistance is facilitated.
6.3.4	The service builds relationships and engages with their local community.
QA7	Leadership and service management
7.1	Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.
7.1.1	Appropriate governance arrangements are in place to manage the service.
7.1.2	The induction of educators, co-ordinators and staff members is comprehensive.
7.1.3	Every effort is made to promote continuity of educators and co-ordinators at the service.
7.1.4	Provision is made to ensure a suitably qualified and experienced educator or co-ordinator leads the development of the curriculum and ensures the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning.
7.1.5	Adults working with children and those engaged in management of the service or residing on the premises are fit and proper.
7.2	There is a commitment to continuous improvement.

7.3	A statement of philosophy is developed and guides all aspects of the service's operations.
7.3.1	The performance of educators, co-ordinators and staff members is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement.
7.3.2	An effective self-assessment and quality improvement process is in place.
7.3.3	Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality service.
7.3.4	Records and information are stored appropriately to ensure confidentiality, are available from the service and are maintained in accordance with legislative requirements.
7.3.5	Administrative systems are established and maintained to ensure the effective operation of the service.

In analysing the interview data, the researcher's knowledge of the Standards in the NQS was bracketed in the research journal. Comparison between the identified themes in this investigation and the NQS was undertaken after all six stages of Bednall's (2006) IPA was completed. The researcher attempted to remove any bias and personal assumptions by separating the analysis of interview data from the document analysis phase of the research investigation.

5.4.1 Structural Quality.

Aspects of structural quality can be termed quantifiable as they are easily observed and measured and there exists little opportunity for individual variation in interpretation (Tayler, Wills, Hayden & Wilson, 2006). Tayler (2009) notes that structural elements are most frequently used as indicators of quality. Existing assessment tools (eg: ECERS-R; CLASS; EPPE) all include some structural components. The NQS provides a range of structural elements as a means of assessing quality within childcare. *Quality Area 3: Physical Environment* and *Quality Area 4: Staffing* explicitly state elements that can be observed and measured.

The Guide to the National Quality Standard (2012) articulates the focus of *Quality Area 3* as, "...on the physical environment and ensuring that it is safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences..."(p. 83). Elements within this area make explicit reference to fencing and security, indoor/outdoor space, shade, furniture and

equipment. *Quality Area 4: Staffing* is concerned with other aspects of structural quality, focusing on “the provision of qualified and experienced educators, coordinators and nominated supervisors...” (*The Guide to the National Quality Standard, 2012*, p. 109). Elements within this area include educator to child ratios, specific staff qualifications and adherence to regulations.

In connecting to the findings of this present research, stakeholders conveyed several structural elements when constructing definitions of quality in their specific context of school based childcare. In particular, the identification of the themes *environmental*, *educational* and *staffing* highlighted the importance that participants placed on the employment of a teacher qualified educator, small ratios and safety features at the centre. Parent Five stated that an aspect of quality at the centre was “...that they’ve actually got a teacher”. Parent Three and Parent Five made specific reference to the equipment in the centre as being a quality indicator as well as safety features such as fencing and the centre being located away from a main road. Parent Three remarked that quality was about “all the safety aspects, like the gates in the play area”. These findings converge with the Standards listed in the *NQS*.

5.4.2 Process Quality.

In contrast to the elements described as structural quality, process quality consists of “...intangibles that are difficult to quantify” (Blau, 1997, p. 358). Elements of process quality include the personality of the educator, management strategies and the quality of relationships and interactions amongst staff, children and families (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002; Tayler, Wills, Hayden & Wilson, 2006). Empirical research in the field is unanimous that process quality is a key consideration when any judgement on childcare quality is being made. Tayler (2009) highlights the “critical importance of relationships and interactions as fundamentals driving...quality programs and shaping the kinds of outcomes demonstrated by programs” (p. 5).

The inclusion of process quality indicators in established assessment tools is common, with the CLASS tool particularly focusing on this area of quality. The *NQS* also contains

a significant number of Standards relevant to process quality, such as *Quality Areas 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7*.

Quality Area 1: Educational Program and Practice consists of a variety of elements including; ensuring every child is supported, educators' ability to respond to children's ideas and that each child's agency is promoted (*The Guide to the National Quality Standard, 2012*). *Quality Area 2: Children's Health and Safety* is concerned with the educator being able to ensure that the comfort and needs of each individual child are met and that each child's health needs are supported (*The Guide to the National Quality Standard, 2012*). These aspects of process quality are reflected in the results from this present study and contributed to the development of the *environmental* theme. The parent group frequently indicated that the ways in which the staff worked with their child, in assisting them to make gains developmentally, was considered to be an indicator of quality. Both the parent and staff groups remarked on hygiene and safety practices, making comments such as:

It seems like really good quality, the outside facilities that they have outside and yeah you know different the whole centre always looks very nice looks good and it's always clean and just, yep, looks good, it's nice for the kids to be able to play in and you know it's safe, it's sort of like they're all enclosed in a safe area so it's good (Parent Three).

Quality Area 5: Relationships with Children and *Quality Area 6: Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities* are both primarily concerned with interactions and the development of reciprocal relationships, explicit components of process quality. These two Standards within the *NQS* include warm and responsive interactions, children and educators engaging in meaningful ways, engagement of families and the local community and the development of respectful and supportive relationships (*The Guide to the National Quality Standard, 2012*). Clear links can be made here between elements of the *Quality Areas 5 and 6* and the themes that emerged from participant responses in this investigation. Specifically, the emergence of the themes *relational* and *social emotional* connect with these Quality Areas.

Overwhelmingly, respondents remarked on the interactions between the staff and the children and the regularity of communication between staff and families as indicators of quality education and care. Staff Member Three explained:

I think the relationships, as well, between the staff, between the children, between the families, if that's not flowing and consistent then there is no care there in the first place...um...basically the staff members, straight away acknowledging a parent when they walk in a door...trying to involve the parents as much as possible, in absolutely every aspect...I guess, an open door policy, as well as not making parents feel like they have to leave the centre as soon as they drop their child off.

The parent group made similar comments such as, "The staff seem really caring and, you know, and they're easy to talk to. If there's been a problem, they just don't hesitate to talk to me" (Parent Two).

Quality Area 7: Leadership and Service Management within the NQS also contains elements of process quality, for example the development of the centre philosophy, commitment to continuous improvement and building a positive culture within the centre (*The Guide to the National Quality Standard, 2012*). These components of process quality resonated with the *relational* theme that developed in this investigation. Participants in both groups identified the feeling or 'vibe' within the centre as an indicator of quality. Participants described this feeling as being positive, and based on open lines of communication between staff and parents. Staff Member Three emphasised this in stating that the atmosphere is based on "...acknowledging a parent when they walk in a door...trying to involve the parents as much as possible." This ability of staff to initiate open lines of communication with parents, and therefore create a culture of conversation and participation, was identified as a key contributor to the construction of quality.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Each of the themes that were identified within the process of data analysis have been discussed, namely; *relational, environmental, social emotional, educational* and

staffing, finding that quality in childcare is determined by stakeholders as the ability of a centre to be both home-like and school-like. In relation to the second research question driving this investigation, it was found that each of the five themes identified in this study can be aligned to the seven Standards of the *NQS*. The ways in which the results from this present study connect with the key policy document indicate that the *NQS* does align with the perspectives of quality education and care as described by staff and parents. In drawing a comparison between the two, it is appropriate to acknowledge the emphasis that both stakeholder groups placed on aspects of process quality over structural quality. The dilemma that arises from this has been recognised within the established tools for assessing quality – that process quality is largely subjective, is intangible and therefore difficult to make a judgement on (Douglas, 2005); however, the present study is indicative that this is what matters to staff and parents.

The following chapter will consider the contribution of this study, including recommendations for practice and for future research. Limitations of the present study will also be addressed.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The findings of this investigation and its contribution to existing research on constructs of quality within childcare will be summarised in this chapter. In doing so, limitations of this study will be addressed and implications for practice and for future research will be explored.

This research sought to investigate how stakeholders understand quality within one school based childcare and to, consequently, provide information on this phenomenon within Western Australia. The dichotomy that has historically existed between the education and care sectors (Childcare Act, 2007; School Education Act, 1999) has been bridged with COAG's implementation of the National Quality Agenda (2009). COAG's Agenda (2009) responds to international research conducted by the OECD (2006) that indicates that Australia must meet the increasing demand for high quality childcare provision. The OECD (2006) also clearly articulate in their paper, *Starting Strong II*, that integrated service provision, along with early intervention, provides children with the best start to life.

COAG's National Quality Agenda (2009) is a policy ensemble comprising of a key document, the *National Quality Standard* (COAG, 2009b). This policy document outlines seven standards of quality to be used to rate childcare services, including those attached to school sites. The regulatory body, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), formed in 2011, are responsible for overseeing the rating of centres and this marks the first national initiative to assess quality within this context.

Prior to the formation of ACECQA, two significant changes occurred within the education and care sectors in Western Australia in 2009. Firstly, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia introduced the provision of a Long Day Care centre on an existing school site, providing for the education and care of children prior to school age. In the same year, Western Australian Government announced that the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia would be accountable for Early Childhood Development (Cameron, 2009). This was a significant alignment with international and national trends and led to the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning which now currently holds responsibility for the provision of childcare located on school sites.

Whilst extensive research exists on quality, largely in relation to education and childcare choice (Bowes, Harrison, Wise, Sanson, Ungerer, Watson & Simpson, 2004; Boyd, Tayler & Thorpe, 2010; Gray, Baxter & Alexander 2008; Wailoo, Anderson, Petersen & Jackson, 2002), the current study aimed to investigate how stakeholders, identified as parents and staff, understood quality within the context of one school based childcare service, *Primary School A*. Further to this, the ways in which stakeholders' constructs of quality aligned with the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b) were also explored.

A qualitative approach was used for this investigation and IPA was chosen for its capacity to allow participants' narrative of quality, in the context of *Primary School A*, to be interpreted. Within the process of IPA, five staff and five parents took part in semi structured interviews and data was examined consistent with Bednall's (2006) stages of IPA. Through this process, five master themes were identified across the stakeholder groups, namely; *relational, environmental, social emotional, educational and staffing*.

The themes that were identified signified the way in which stakeholders describe quality specifically in the context of *Primary School A*. In discussing these themes in response to the initial research question, 'How is 'quality childcare' described by individuals from various stakeholder groups?', two characteristics of quality became

apparent; that quality school based childcare was presented as being both home-like and school-like.

The notion that good quality school based childcare is simultaneously 'home-like' and 'school-like' may appear contradictory; however these distinct concepts are considered to be complementary. If school based childcare can provide a nurturing, welcoming environment, reflective of the routines that exist in the home, and, at the same time, provide for a smooth transition into the schooling system through the familiarity of the school environment and staff, then the opportunity exists for school based childcare to provide high quality education and care, as described by key stakeholders.

Subsequently, the themes were compared to the *National Quality Standard* (COAG, 2009b) to determine how constructs of quality childcare provision aligned, and to investigate whether this tool for assessing quality standards did in fact assess what was considered to be 'quality', by stakeholders. Each of the five master themes were evidenced within the seven elements of the *National Quality Standard* (2009b) indicating that this policy document is assessing elements of quality that are identified by stakeholders.

6.2 Original Contribution to Research

Two key contributions to research on quality in school based childcare have been gained through this investigation. This study has contributed to the existing field of knowledge by investigating the unexplored phenomena of school based childcare in Western Australia in *Primary School A*. The most significant contribution of this study is the light it sheds on key stakeholders' construction of quality as both 'home-like' and 'school-like', therefore providing further opportunity for the relationship between home and school to be developed. In bridging the dichotomous relationship between education and care, stakeholder perspectives suggest that school based childcare can be viewed as a stepping stone allowing for the security of the home and, at the same time, offering a smooth transition for children into the school sector. The second key

contribution of this research is the finding that the *National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b)* does identify elements of quality described by the stakeholder groups.

6.3 Implications for Practice

Two implications for practice arise from the findings of this study. Firstly, that the introduction of school based childcare provides a unique opportunity to transition children and families from childcare into the school environment. Findings from this research clearly articulated that quality childcare was determined by the ability of a centre to be both 'school-like' and 'home-like'. With the physical connection that exists with the childcare located on the school site, staff in both sectors have the opportunity to explore ways to better connect with families and to share information across the two settings. Through employing structured procedures for the transition between childcare and school, opportunities to engage in early intervention strategies with families and their children will also arise.

The second implication pertains to the school based childcare environment. The childcare operates as a separate entity on the school site. In addition to the first implication, the school and childcare can continue to capitalise on the facilities across the two environments by including the childcare in appropriate school routines and linking staff across the early childhood years. Making these connections will again aid in the provision of smooth transitions for children and their families into the school sector, which was identified as an indicator of quality by stakeholders.

6.4 Implications for Future Research

Findings from this investigation provide a foundation for further research into quality constructs within this new phenomena of school based childcare. Extant literature consistently emphasises the difficulty that arises in defining and assessing a value laden term such as 'quality' (Dahlberg et al. 1999; Logan & Sumsion, 2010).

Participants in this investigation frequently expressed difficulty in initially describing

characteristics of quality, requiring probing during the interview; however, participants were then able to articulate a variety of quality indicators. Layzer and Goodson (2006) questioned “whether quality means the same thing across different care settings” (p. 557) and this investigation, along with existing literature, suggests that, whilst quality may be difficult to define, there appears to be some consistency about what it is that matters in terms of quality. This research indicates that elements of both process and structural quality are deemed to be important to stakeholders, with staff and parents providing similar responses regarding quality indicators. As Logan and Sumsion (2010) and Dahlberg et al. (1999) state, though, there remains difficulty in assessing quality.

The *National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b)* is the tool utilised for assessing childcare quality, and this investigation found that the indicators of quality articulated by participants did align with the Standards within this assessment tool. The challenge now is to investigate how this tool will be used to assess and rate quality. Rothman et al. (2012) have initiated this process through investigating the validity of the NQS as an assessment tool. Along with further research on the NQS as a ‘quality’ tool for assessment, it may also become necessary to explore whether the term ‘quality’ remains the most appropriate way to describe an expected set of national Standards.

6.5 Limitations

Three limitations were identified within this research. The first pertains to context. Whilst research is consistent in suggesting that ‘quality’ be considered within a particular context and therefore must take into account the needs and identities of the local community (Tobin, 2005), this can also be viewed as a limitation.

A second limitation relates to the selection of stakeholders. This study identified parents and staff as two distinct stakeholder groups when investigating the way in which quality was constructed. As has been indicated in previous studies, children’s perspectives on quality within childcare would broaden current understandings of this concept (Ceglowski, 2004; Layzer & Goodson, 2006). Findings also suggest that quality is a “relative concept shaped by socio-cultural values, as well as national, economic

and political contexts in which early childhood services are provided” (Brownlee, Berthelson & Segaran, 2009, p.454). Consequently, multiple perspectives of quality ought to be gained, including those of children attending the service and policymakers involved in the implementation of the *National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b)*. In taking a wider sample of stakeholder groups, considerations should also be made regarding the demographics of participants to investigate the contribution of cultural and economic factors on descriptions of quality education and care.

A further limitation worth noting is that the perspectives gained from participants provide a ‘snapshot’ in time and, as recognised within an interpretivist paradigm, people’s perspectives are in a constant state of flux (Oliver, 2011). In addition to this, through the chosen approach of IPA, it is recognised that the researcher interpreted the interview data to identify the themes. Whilst all precautions were taken to minimise researcher bias, such as the process of bracketing and the use of the research journal, it is recognised that this is “enormously difficult” (Reynolds, 2003, p. 556).

6.6 Concluding Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the constructs of quality education and care within the new phenomenon of school based childcare. Constructs of quality were formed from the perspectives of two stakeholder groups: five staff and five parents. A further component of this investigation was the way in which stakeholder constructs of quality aligned with newly implemented policy, the *National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b)*. Findings indicated that both staff and parents described quality in terms of five master themes; relational, environmental, social emotional, educational and staffing. Through the analytical process, two characteristics became apparent; that quality within the context of school based childcare was the ability of the centre to be both ‘home-like’ and ‘school-like’. A key implication for practice, arising from the investigation, is the opportunity for staff in both the school sector and the childcare sector, to work together with families to provide smooth transitions between home and school. Through thematic and document analysis, comparison was then made to the *National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b)*. In doing so, it became evident that this

policy document does include the characteristics of quality that were valued by the stakeholder groups.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions (Parent Group)

Initial welcome/ greeting

1. Explain why you have chosen this particular service for your child.
2. What is it about this service that makes you feel comfortable to leave your child here?
3. What do you look for to affirm your choice of childcare provider?
4. If I said that a service was offering 'high quality education and care', what do you interpret this to mean?
5. What does 'quality' look like in the context of this service?
6. Are there any other comments you would like to add about this topic?

Thank you statement

APPENDIX 2

Interview Questions (Staff Group)

Initial welcome/ greeting

1. Explain why you have chosen this particular service for employment.
2. What do you look for to affirm your choice of childcare employer?
3. If I said that a service was offering 'high quality education and care', what do you interpret this to mean?
4. What does 'quality' look like in the context of this service?
5. Are there any other comments you would like to add about this topic?

Thank you statement

APPENDIX 3 Staff Information Letter



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Achieving International Excellence

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Constructs of quality in school based childcare for 0-3 year olds

Dear

I am writing on behalf of Master of Education candidate, Christine McGunnigle, who is undertaking a study that aims to investigate how 'quality childcare' is defined by parents and carers/educators? The study will examine parent and staff views of 'quality' in childcare for 0-3 year olds. The school/day care facility where you are employed has agreed to take part in the study. Christine is well known to your school and has extensive childcare experience. I am writing to ask if you are willing to participate in the study and explain what your participation would involve.

This study requires a limited number of participants and if the number of staff willing to participate exceeds the number required, participants will be purposively selected to reflect a range of roles and responsibilities. The data collected in this study will be used in a thesis and possibly in publications that will provide important information for all those involved in childcare policy and practice. There are no obvious risks or inconvenience associated with participation in this project.

What does participation in the research project involve?

- You will be invited to take part in a conversational interview with Christine – approx 40 mins – to discuss what you think 'quality' means in relation to childcare for 0-3 year olds.
- You will be asked to give permission for the recording and transcription of the interview.

What you need to know about the research process?

- Participants can withdraw at any time
- Participant contributions can be destroyed or discussed with the researchers as appropriate. However, if the project has already been published at the time a participant decides to withdraw, their contribution cannot be removed from the publication
- This research has been approved by the ethics committees at the University of Western Australia.

- Your contribution will be strictly confidential
- No information on individual participants will be published in the report or any other publications resulting from this study.
- The data from this project will be stored securely at The University of Western Australia and will only be accessed by the research team. The data will be stored for a minimum period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or require more information about the research project please do not hesitate to call Robert Faulkner on 6488 7642 or email: robert.faulkner@uwa.edu.au. When you have had time to read this information sheet, please return the attached signed consent forms and return it to reception in the addressed envelope attached. This project information letter is for you to keep.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Robert Faulkner, Chief Investigator

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the University of Western Australia, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hreo-research@uwa.edu.au. All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information For and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.

APPENDIX 4
Parent Information Letter



**THE UNIVERSITY OF
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This study requires a limited number of participants and if the number of parents willing to participate exceeds the number required, participants will be selected at random. The data collected in this study will be used in a thesis and possibly in publications that will provide important information for all those involved in childcare policy and practice. There are no obvious risks or inconvenience associated with participation in this project.

What does participation in the research project involve?

- You will be invited to take part in a conversational interview with Christine – approx 40 mins – to discuss what you think 'quality' means in relation to childcare for 0-3 year olds.
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If you have any questions or require more information about the research project please do not hesitate to call Robert Faulkner on 6488 7642 or email: robert.faulkner@uwa.edu.au. When you have had time to read this information sheet, please return the attached signed consent forms and return it to your daycare school in the addressed envelope attached. This project information letter is for you to keep.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Dr. Robert Faulkner.

Dr Robert Faulkner, Chief Investigator

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the University of Western Australia, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hreo-research@uwa.edu.au. All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information For and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.

APPENDIX 5
Consent Form



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Achieving International Excellence

Constructs of quality in school based childcare for 0-3 year olds

Participation consent form

Please return by xxxx

- I have read the information letter, which explains the research project, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that participation in this project is entirely voluntary.
- I understand that I may withdraw my permission at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that all information provided is treated as strictly confidential and will not be released by the researcher in any form that will identify me. The only exception to this principle of confidentiality is if a court subpoenas documentation or directs other legal means. I have been advised as to what data is being collected, what the purpose is, and what will be done with the data upon completion of the research.
- I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not used.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Contact details (please provide a phone number or e-mail address so that an appointment may be made to interview you):

I agree that interviews may be audio recorded for the purpose of this research. All audio recordings will be securely stored on password protected computers.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the University of Western Australia, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time.

In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hreo-research@uwa.edu.au

All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information For and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project."

