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## Constructing quality childcare: Perspectives of quality and their connection to Belonging, Being and Becoming

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**Constructing quality childcare:  
Perspectives of quality and their connection to  
Belonging, Being and Becoming**

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**Abstract**

Discourse on quality, within the context of childcare, has moved beyond the level of licensing to consider children's right to belong. Within Western Australia (WA), there has been a paradigm shift as international research literature on quality childcare has advocated the long-term benefits for individuals and the community when children experience high quality early education and care. This paradigm shift has resulted in new legislation in WA that articulates the components of quality across childcare, as well as the criteria on which centres are assessed. This paper reports the findings of an investigation into the constructs of quality from two stakeholder groups; parents and educators. Findings from this study indicated that, when it comes to quality, what matters most to both parents and educators are the types of interactions children have with others and their environment; the ways in which children's needs are met; and children's experiences for development and learning. These findings align with the themes of the nationally mandated early years' document – the Early Years Learning Framework (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009) Belonging, Being and Becoming.

### **Introduction**

The early childhood education and care sector, within Western Australia (WA), has undergone significant change. This change has been focused on a national initiative to improve quality within the sector, and subsequently, develop a more transparent understanding of the construct of quality within early years' settings. In determining what constitutes quality, Australia has looked to the international arena and drawn on research and practice to inform new policy for implementation across birth to eight years' contexts. Most significantly, Australia acted on the findings from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report, *Starting Strong II* (2006). This report illustrated that Australia, when compared with other countries of similar economic viability, provided limited investment in early years care and education, which would result in poorer long term outcomes for both individuals and society (OECD, 2006). In reporting on Australia's investment in the early years, the OECD also brought the issue of quality to the forefront of the political agenda, articulating the link between high quality service in the early years and a more productive and economically advantaged society for the future.

The *Starting Strong II* (OECD, 2006) report became the impetus for reform across the early years' education and care landscape within Australia. The reform consisted of the development of new legislation, policy and infrastructure with the aim of raising quality across birth to 8 years settings. With such a focus on quality, it became apparent that an understanding of the construct of quality in the context of early years' settings was required. This paper reports on the findings of an investigation into the construct of quality, as interpreted by parents and educators working with children aged 2-5 years.

### **Background and Context**

In WA in 2006, when the OECD released their report, the responsibility for providing childcare belonged to the State Government Department for Communities, whilst the Department for Education held responsibility for the education of children. This historical dichotomy between education and care that had existed for over a century became the subject of debate. At a national level, in 2007, the then Labor leader and Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, acknowledged the 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 limited investment by the Government into this area. A suggestion was made that increased investment in services for children younger than school age were envisaged to 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 recognized 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).

In 2009, came the initiatives by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), *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). 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 early childhood, as well as the need for national consistency between service providers (COAG, 2009b).

The National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2012a) outlined specific standards of quality required of services that provide both care and education for children, specifically from birth to five years of age, and was developed as a tool to rate quality within school-based childcare centers. The Standard is based on international research, as noted in *The Guide to the National Quality Standard*, and is designed to “give services and families a better understanding of a quality service” (ACECQA, 2012b, p. 5). Standard One of the National Quality Standard, *Education Program and Practice*, mandates the use of the *Early Years Learning Framework: Belonging, Being and Becoming* (DEEWR, 2009) by all educators working across all early childhood settings. The *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) was developed as part of the national strategy in an effort to increase consistency of language and practice and to integrate education and care.

As a result of the introduction of these initiatives, in 2009, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia opened their first childcare centers, catering for the long daycare of children younger than school age, on three of their existing school sites. This initiative demonstrated a shift in thinking from the separation of education and care that existed in the last century, to a new understanding of integrated service delivery, as well as demonstrating a clear alignment to Australian Government policy.

One of the school-based childcare centers was the setting for the study discussed in this paper, which focused on educator and parent constructs of quality in school-based childcare. The specific context of Catholic schooling within Western Australia is therefore pertinent. Catholic Schools, under the direction of the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA), have a 150 year long history, and this sector has grown to now encompass 157 schools, ranging from the education and care of children in the early years through to secondary education (CEOWA, 2011a). The 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 CEOWA (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*.

### **Constructs of Quality in Education and Care - A Review of the Literature**

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 legislation that have existed at particular times. A problem associated with defining a term such as ‘quality’ is the subjective and evaluative nature of the word (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 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). Despite definitional difficulties, empirical research linking childcare quality to children’s development and the possible effects of this are extensive (Bowes, et al., 2004). Studies highlight the long term benefits of high quality childcare, both for the child and for wider society

(Gallinsky, 2006; Logan, Press & Sumsion, 2012). These studies indicate that ‘high quality’ childcare is determined by the center’s ability to meet the needs of the child through both the center processes and facilities.

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” (National Institute of Child Health Development, 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 recognized 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, such as staffing arrangements and program delivery 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 local communities (Tobin, 2005).

Research on childcare quality largely recognizes 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 educators, child to educator 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 educator, children and families (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002; Tayler, Wills, Hayden & Wilson, 2006). The interpretation of quality as both structural and process orientated has found its way into the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b) and research shows that “both process quality ...and structural [quality]... features have been consistently found to predict children's cognitive, language, and social development” (Vandell, 2004, p. 407).

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). Tobin (2005) states that “It is out of the conversations between parents, staff, and directors that quality standards most meaningfully can arise” (p. 433) and, therefore, in the study reported in this article, perspectives were gathered from both educator and parent stakeholder groups within their specific childcare context.

### **Belonging as a component of quality**

Process quality consists of difficult to measure constructs, such as the quality of relationships and interactions that exist between educators and a child, as well as those that are facilitated between children (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002; Tayler, Wills, Hayden & Wilson, 2006). Relationship development, which encompasses, for example: feelings of security, the

development of positive attachments, resilience and the development of social skills, are described in the literature as components of ‘belonging’ (Gordon, O’Toole & Whitman, 2008). Belonging is fundamental in the early years of development (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008) and subsequently has found its way into the childcare quality debate.

The United Nations acknowledge children’s right to belong within several of their Articles on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Whilst the acknowledgements aren’t explicit, the value of belonging in childhood is recognized through, for example, the right to an identity and to cultural opportunities (United Nations, 1989). Literature promotes belonging as an inter-related concept and one that is fundamental to children’s development (Peers & Fler, 2014; Stratigos, 2015; Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). Children’s sense of belonging has been identified as a foundation for self-confidence and an indicator of later school success (Capps, 2003; Clinton, 2008). When belonging is considered as a significant component of children’s development, it is not surprising that it features, often implicitly, within measures of process quality in early childhood settings. Belonging is described in literature as inextricably tied to the concepts of identity and agency (being) and to learning, development and participation (becoming). Children require a sense of belonging if they are to have the opportunity to be successful in their learning and to become citizens of the world (Clinton, 2008).

### **Research Design**

A qualitative approach was adopted for this research, specifically utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). 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 being 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 contextualized level and, as such, the use of IPA was employed for this study. The role of the researcher in this study was to interpret participants’ narratives and to understand their construction of quality education and care within the context of 2-4 year old school based childcare, as far as possible putting aside personal preconceptions through the use of a researcher journal.

A key feature of IPA is the process of ‘bracketing’ The bracketing process, as explained by Bednall (2006) involves “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). Essentially, the principle of setting aside the researcher’s preconceptions is central to this process and it seeks to improve authenticity in the voice of the participant (Bednall, 2006). Smith (2004) elaborated on the use IPA and articulates its three characteristics; it is idiographic, inductive and interrogative. Firstly, being idiographic, IPA research is the detailed focus and analysis of a small sample. 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 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 in an attempt to put aside personal assumptions. In relation to the study discussed in this paper, all three characteristics of IPA were featured in the research.

The Catholic school selected for this study is identified as Totsville. Totsville was selected purposively, as a provider of school based childcare. All required ethical clearances were obtained prior to undertaking this research. Totsville was aligned to a co-educational school, providing facilities for children from toddlers (2 years) through to Year 6. Totsville's policy on the operation of their childcare facility stated operating hours of 6.30am to 6.30pm.

### **Participants**

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

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

Participants in both categories were given pseudonyms to preserve anonymity. Invitations to participate were given out to 40 parents at drop-off and pick-up times. Five parents volunteered and these five were selected; this was then a convenience sample. Educators were selected using purposive sampling, to ensure the involvement of educators with a range of qualifications. Educators involved held a range of qualifications including Degree, Diploma and Certificate III qualifications. The educator group was approached by the Principal at Totsville with the invitation to participate in the research. Information letters and consent forms were provided for both educator and parent participant groups. Consent forms were collected by the researcher prior to the commencement of data collection.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The interview process was undertaken on an individual basis with parent and teacher participants. Interviews were conducted with individuals for approximately 45 minutes each. Educator interviews took place at the school based childcare. Parent interviews took place at a location convenient to the participant, which in most cases was also the school based childcare. The interview followed a semi-structured format, allowing the researcher to move flexibly between questions based on the participants' response. Interview questions for the parent group included, for example: *what is it about this service that makes you feel comfortable to leave your child here?* And *What does quality look like in the context of this service?* Interview questions for the educator group were similar, such as: *What do you look for to affirm your choice of childcare employer?* And *If I said that a service was offering high quality education and care, what do you interpret this to mean?*

Interviews were digitally recorded, affording the researcher the opportunity to focus on the response of the participant and to probe responses for depth or clarity. Interviews were then transcribed, at the semantic level, by the researcher. All participants were provided with the opportunity to check their interview transcript for accuracy, however only two participants accepted this offer. Interview transcripts were subsequently analyzed according to a six step process, identified by Bednall, (2006), as is consistent with IPA protocols. The parent and

educator transcripts were analyzed collectively using Bednall's (2006) processes. Initially, items of significance were flagged' as they appeared on each of the transcripts and then these were grouped together to construct themes. Transcripts were then revisited to check for accuracy of the thematic coding. Following this process, any bracketed information, written in the researcher journal, was also considered. Considering the bracketed information was an attempt to keep researcher bias removed. 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 National Quality Standard (2009b).

### **Findings**

Findings from the interview data were interpreted through the process of IPA, resulting in the emergence of a number of sub-themes that tell the stories of the participants and articulate their perspectives on quality education and care within childcare. These were grouped into five master themes; relational, environmental, social emotional, educational and staffing.

#### **Relational**

The role of relationships in contributing to the notion of quality within a childcare service was raised by each of the participants. Educator One emphasized the importance of having a 'sense of belonging' within a center, so that everyone felt welcomed. She explained that a quality childcare isn't just about looking after children, but is about creating a community of belonging. Educator Two expanded on the 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, Educator Two commented, "... just letting them [parents] know how their [child's] day went...it builds a rapport with them." Parent Two remarked that, "I just, yeah, I guess you 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, was described as being brought on by her relationship with the educators at the center – "The staff seem really caring and, you know... they're easy to talk to."

#### **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 educator interviews. This theme was identified from comments regarding the location of the center 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 center, and so is closely related to the first master theme, relational. Parent One stated that the expectations of the center were similar to those set within her family; she stated, "It's just like it is at home." 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, educators did provide responses related to the 'home-like' nature of the center as an indicator of quality.

### **Social emotional**

In responding to the interview 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 center. Educator participants made comments such as, "I would like to see the children...playing, having fun...so just to enjoy themselves," (Educator 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." (Educator Two).

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 Two stated:

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.

### **Educational**

Each of the participants, within both groups, made comments on the educational aspects 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 based learning, and the use of mandated documents to guide practice. 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. Educator 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 ...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..."

### **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 aspect related to the staff at the center emerged and this was evident across both participant groups. The qualifications and training of the staff were raised as key factors 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?" (Parent Two). Parent One remarked that she would "...probably expect to see more staff qualified...you know, I don't know what you'd call them – early learning teachers," employed in a quality childcare provider. Educator Three elaborated in detail regarding the relationship between quality and the staff at a center, 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 centers and these 16 year old girls... 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 realize that this is a job you have to be passionate about so that would...kind of link up to the quality care...

### **Discussion**

This research investigation sought to determine educator and parent constructs of quality within school based childcare, and to subsequently compare these constructs to the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b). The findings presented thus far illustrate that quality for both parents and educators can be described within the following themes: relational, environmental, social emotional, educational and staffing. The following section discusses the alignment of these findings with the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b) and in doing so, addresses the topics of belonging, being and becoming.

#### **Quality Constructed as Belonging, Being and Becoming**

Through thematic and document analysis, the second part of this research, investigating the connections between the participant responses and the content of the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b), was explored. It was found that each of the five themes could be aligned to the seven Standards of the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b). The ways in which the findings from this research connect with the key policy document indicate that the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b) aligns comfortably with the perspectives of quality education and care as described by educators and parents. More specifically, the findings illustrated a clear connection between the constructs of quality provided by the participants and the themes of the Early Years Learning Framework – Belonging, Being and Becoming (DEEWR, 2009), mandated for use within Standard One of the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b).

#### ***Belonging***

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) 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). Belonging involves experiences and feelings that provide a sense of ‘fitting in’ and can include belonging to a family, a culture, a class, and a community. Feeling a sense of belonging is fundamental to the positive development of an individual’s social-emotional capacity as it builds on the notion of security (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). Being in relationships with others is central to this concept. When children feel that they belong, they become active participants and contributors in their world (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). When belonging is recognized as a construct of quality within childcare, it was found to be associated with relationships; with social-emotional development; with the environment; and staffing at the center.

### *Being*

To 'be' has strong connections with the previous EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) theme of 'belonging'. Children must first feel safe, to feel that they can contribute actively to their environment and to interact with others – to belong - , if they are to truly 'be'. The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) explains the being is about “the significance of the here and now in children’s lives. It is about the present and children knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life’s joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life.” (p. 7). Being, as a theme within the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), draws focus on the role of childhood within today’s society. As related to the construct of quality, it means providing opportunities for children to engage in play, to develop positive self-efficacy, to take appropriate risks and develop resilience; and to co-construct their learning. The notion of being was found to connect with the themes of social-emotional, relational, environmental and staffing, which emerged from this research.

### *Becoming*

The theme of becoming was found to connect with the themes of staffing and education in this research. The themes of staffing and education focused on quality as constructed by the educators and the programs they implement. The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) describes this theme of becoming as the acknowledgement that belonging and being change – “children’s identities, knowledge, understandings, capacities, skills and relationships change during childhood...it emphasizes learning to participate fully and actively in society” (p. 7). When educators consider the individual needs of children and provide flexible opportunities for learning and development, they are allowing children to 'become'. Figure 1 illustrates Belonging, Being and Becoming, as three points of a triangle. Each of the themes are situated on the triangle in relation to its connection with the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) themes.

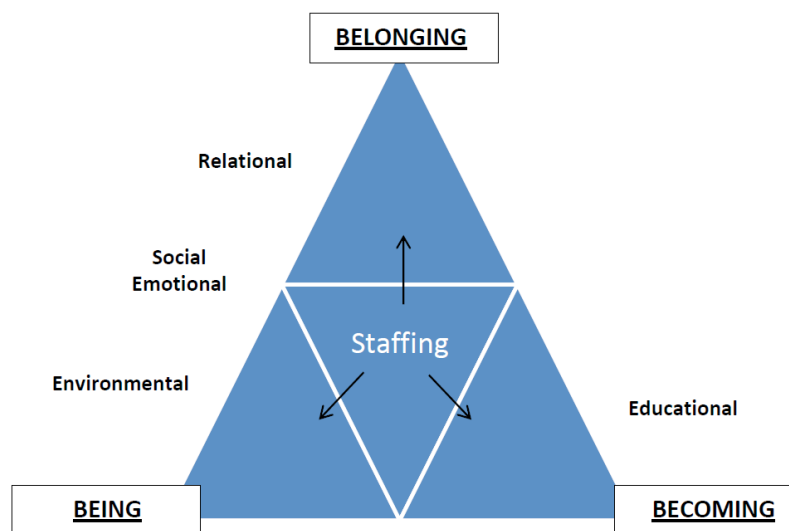


Figure 1. Relationship of themes to the Early Years Learning Framework

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The ‘relational’ theme, in this investigation, is identified as aligning closely with the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) 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 (DEEWR, 2009). The theme ‘staffing’ was positioned at the center of the diagram, as characteristics of this theme resonated with all three; Belonging, Being and Becoming.

Figure 1 clearly illustrates that the constructs of quality provided by the participants in this research successfully align with the themes of the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009). Furthermore, Figure 1 draws attention to the crucial role of belonging. The notions of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ are reliant on the notion of belonging. A focus on belonging, as an indicator of quality, must be the starting point. When children feel a sense of belonging, they feel secure, have developed positive attachments and a strong sense of wellbeing. This allows children to ‘be’, which in turn provides the opportunity to ‘become’.

In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge the emphasis that both stakeholder groups placed on aspects of process quality (relationships; belonging) over structural quality (child-staff ratios; qualifications), further emphasizing the need to focus on children’s sense of belonging. The dilemma that arises from this has been recognized 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 was indicative that this is, in fact, what matters most to educators and parents.

### **Conclusion**

The move toward integrated service delivery in early childhood through the introduction of school-based childcare facilities has been the result of a Government initiative to raise quality in the early years. In acknowledging that Australia, as a nation, could do more to improve children’s future success and therefore positively impact society has seen the development and implementation of new legislation, policy and infrastructure. This has resulted in a change in the way quality has been viewed in the Childcare sector, as policy shifts its focus from issues of licensing to consider quality constructed as children’s right to belong, to be and to become.

This paper reported on the findings from an investigation into stakeholder constructs of quality in childcare, to find that this is what matters most – quality is deemed to be measured by children’s ability to belong, to be and to become – the three themes articulated within the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) as part of the National Quality Standard (COAG, 2009b). For Australia as a nation, attempting to raise quality in the early years, a focus on children’s ability to be in relationship (belonging); to enjoy a childhood and have their needs met (being); and to learn and develop (becoming) is certainly a positive move forward for children, and for society.

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