Chapter 2

A Genealogy of Quality

Introduction

This chapter outlines how the theory and practice of quality have been integral to the early childhood profession. In reviewing the literature, parts of the broader quality assurance story are interwoven with fragments of the history of early childhood development and care. The early history of the profession carries traces of a number of co-existing concepts of quality in early childhood education. I examine how each contributes separately and/or in concert to achieve a multiplicity of positions on quality. This chapter includes a specific focus on Australian Aboriginal early childhood services and how practices, policy and research on quality in early childhood education have impacted on their development.

In this chapter I have sought to build a picture of where the various divergent formulations of quality have come from and consider what is happening in the space between the two extremes. This chapter also analyses the Australian approach, the *Putting Children First: Quality Improvement and Accreditation System* (NCAC 1993). In recognition that what was happening within early childhood education was part of a much bigger scenario, aspects of the quality assurance movement that developed in the service sectors of health, higher education and industry generally, are also examined.

Questions of what "quality" is and how can it best be achieved have been central to the focus of the early childhood profession since it began approximately 175 years ago (Clyde 1980). My reasons for looking back in this chapter at the precursors to the current debate, were to gain a sense of the origins from which policies and approaches to sustaining quality have emerged. This investigation makes it apparent that the *Putting Children First: Quality Improvement and Accreditation System* [QIAS] did not suddenly appear as an over-arching tool of government and the professional
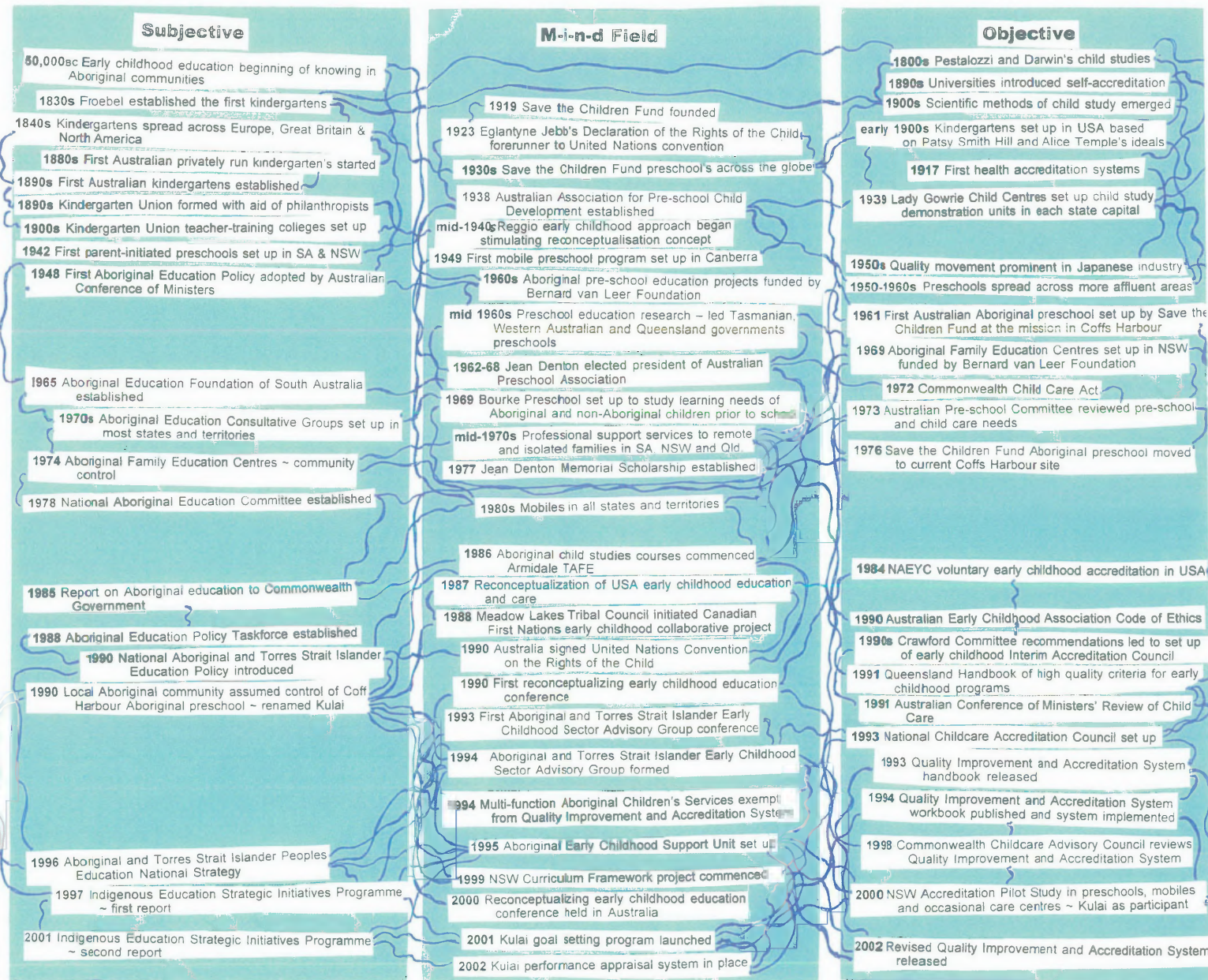
associations, to inform and control. Rather QIAS evolved from a past, where concepts of quality practice became embedded in the ideals of the profession when first practised with young children by Froebel in 1839 (Moore 2002: 15). In examining the origins of child-centred education, Simon (1981) identifies Froebel's work as the base from which this approach emerged.

Early childhood educators such as Evans (1996a) and Wangmann (1992b), note that division exists between community expectations and professional perceptions of the complex process of providing quality programs. Phillips (1987a cited in Ochiltree 1994: 21) identifies quality as the priority field of study for "early educators and developmental psychologists". Clyde (1980: 7) poses a rhetorical question in the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood:* 'Can early childhood educators really be accountable?'

> If accountability implies a need for teachers to understand the relationship between what they are trying to do and the teaching methods, and the organisation and implementation of learning experiences in certain physical settings which they select in order to achieve these aims, it can be argued that early childhood educators have always been accountable … since the time of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel.

Figure 1 below, examines precursors and aspects of the quality assurance movement as a series of interconnected and interrelated events that impact on each other in multiple ways. The figure presents only a limited view of a very complex series of events. Using a framework described by Sheridan (2001) in her overview of quality in early childhood pedagogy across the world, I have assembled fragments of the past into "subjective" (left hand column) and "objective" approaches (right hand column). By inserting Pence's (2001) m-i-n-d field (central column) into Sheridan's framework, a glimpse is provided of thinking within the profession in the space-in-between the subjective and objective approaches. Pence (2001) argues that significant elements of quality are missed if only the two extremes are considered.

Figure 1: Research tool ~ mapping quality literature

Subjective

50,000BC Early childhood education beginning of knowing in Aboriginal communities

1830s Froebel established the first kindergartens

1840s Kindergartens spread across Europe, Great Britain & North America

1880s First Australian privately run kindergarten's started

1890s First Australian kindergartens established

1890s Kindergarten Union formed with aid of philanthropists

1900s Kindergarten Union teacher-training colleges set up

1942 First parent-initiated preschools set up in SA & NSW

1948 First Aboriginal Education Policy adopted by Australian Conference of Ministers

1965 Aboriginal Education Foundation of South Australia established

1970s Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups set up in most states and territories

1974 Aboriginal Family Education Centres ~ community control

1978 National Aboriginal Education Committee established

1985 Report on Aboriginal education to Commonwealth Government

1988 Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce established

1990 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy introduced

1990 Local Aboriginal community assumed control of Coff Harbour Aboriginal preschool ~ renamed Kulai

1996 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Education National Strategy

1997 Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme ~ first report

2001 Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme ~ second report

M-i-n-d Field

1919 Save the Children Fund founded

1923 Eglantyne Jebb's Declaration of the Rights of the Child forerunner to United Nations convention

1930s Save the Children Fund preschool's across the globe

1938 Australian Association for Pre-school Child Development established

mid-1940s Reggio early childhood approach began stimulating reconceptualisation concept

1949 First mobile preschool program set up in Canberra

1960s Aboriginal pre-school education projects funded by Bernard van Leer Foundation

mid 1960s Preschool education research – led Tasmanian, Western Australian and Queensland governments preschools

1962-68 Jean Denton elected president of Australian Preschool Association

1969 Bourke Preschool set up to study learning needs of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children prior to school

mid-1970s Professional support services to remote and isolated families in SA, NSW and Qld.

1977 Jean Denton Memorial Scholarship established

1980s Mobiles in all states and territories

1986 Aboriginal child studies courses commenced Armidale TAFE

1987 Reconceptualization of USA early childhood education and care

1988 Meadow Lakes Tribal Council initiated Canadian First Nations early childhood collaborative project

1990 Australia signed United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

1990 First reconceptualizing early childhood education conference

1993 First Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group conference

1994 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group formed

1994 Multi-function Aboriginal Children's Services exempt from Quality Improvement and Accreditation System

1995 Aboriginal Early Childhood Support Unit set up

1999 NSW Curriculum Framework project commenced

2000 Reconceptualizing early childhood education conference held in Australia

2001 Kulai goal setting program launched

2002 Kulai performance appraisal system in place

Objective

1800s Pestalozzi and Darwin's child studies

1890s Universities introduced self-accreditation

1900s Scientific methods of child study emerged

early 1900s Kindergartens set up in USA based on Patsy Smith Hill and Alice Temple's ideals

1917 First health accreditation systems

1939 Lady Gowrie Child Centres set up child study demonstration units in each state capital

1950s Quality movement prominent in Japanese industry

1950-1960s Preschools spread across more affluent areas

1961 First Australian Aboriginal preschool set up by Save the Children Fund at the mission in Coffs Harbour

1969 Aboriginal Family Education Centres set up in NSW funded by Bernard van Leer Foundation

1972 Commonwealth Child Care Act

1973 Australian Pre-school Committee reviewed pre-school and child care needs

1976 Save the Children Fund Aboriginal preschool moved to current Coffs Harbour site

1984 NAEYC voluntary early childhood accreditation in USA

1990 Australian Early Childhood Association Code of Ethics

1990s Crawford Committee recommendations led to set up of early childhood Interim Accreditation Council

1991 Queensland Handbook of high quality criteria for early childhood programs

1991 Australian Conference of Ministers' Review of Child Care

1993 National Childcare Accreditation Council set up

1993 Quality Improvement and Accreditation System handbook released

1994 Quality Improvement and Accreditation System workbook published and system implemented

1998 Commonwealth Childcare Advisory Council reviews Quality Improvement and Accreditation System

2000 NSW Accreditation Pilot Study in preschools, mobiles and occasional care centres ~ Kulai as participant

2002 Revised Quality Improvement and Accreditation System released

Subjective view

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence's (1999) examination of the origins of quality, reflects back to the pre-industrial period when subjectivity and local bases of communication and thinking were privileged. When early childhood education began to emerge in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the professions and services were small in number and typically clustered around the centres of major cities. This location and size enabled internal standards and quality measures to be applied consistently at a local level. However as modern thinking took over many professionals turned away from a personalised perspective of 'subjectivity' and looked to 'objective' approaches to quality for answers.

In recent times, segments of the early childhood profession have advocated for a reconceptualisation of quality as a 'subjective', constructed term that continually changes according to the stakeholders who define it and the context in which the term is examined (Dahlberg et al 1999; Grieshaber & Canella 2001a; Pence & Moss 1994; Viruru & Cannella 2001). In the last few decades of the twentieth century this sector of the profession has identified quality as a process unable to be labelled in a definitive way. This constructivist view rejects the concept of the universal child and the position of professionals as the only experts in the field (Tait 2000: 231).

Understanding the conjunction between subjective and local issues is important in this thesis. In making reference to 'the local', I have used Featherstone's (1996: 52) descriptors of a space located within a limited geographical area where:

> [I]t is the regularity and frequency of contacts with a group of significant others which are held to sustain a common culture ... [with] the generation of powerful, emotionally sustaining rituals, ceremonies, and collective memories ... acting like batteries which store and recharge the sense of commonality.

The concept of 'local' is opened further when Featherstone (1996: 55) recognises its complex and often chaotic features in saying, "[I]nternally we may be able to consider the community as incorporating all sorts of independencies, rivalries, power struggles and conflicts."

Objective view

As the technological and knowledge advances of modernism emerged in the Enlightenment period the reach of services and products spread across nations and the globe. These advances were accompanied by " a search for order and certainty" with a privileging of "objectivity and quantification", which included instruments to measure quality (Dahlberg et al 1999: 89). Those who espouse an 'objective' concept of quality, both within the early childhood profession and more widely in society, considered quality to be able to be specifically defined by universal tools of measurement to establish a 'fitness of purpose' or 'goodness of fit' framework (Bredekamp & Cropple 1997; Harms & Clifford 1980; NAEYC 1984; NCAC 1993; Wangmann 1992a). This position specifies an ideal child, and curriculum guidelines to achieve best practice through construction of a 'model' or 'normative child' (Tait 2000). These standardised measurement tools have also been used to identify the professional development needs of early childhood staff (Duff, Brown & Van Scoy 1995:82-83, Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson 2001). Commonalities exists between 'global' and 'objective' perspectives. The notion of 'global' has been described by Featherstone (1996: 61) to include:

> [T]he deregulation of markets and capital flows … to produce a degree of homogenization in procedures, working practices, and organizational cultures. In addition we can point to some convergences in the lifestyle, habitus and demeanor of these various sets of professionals.

Views from the middle ground

Particularly in the last decade, voices have emerged into the literature from a middle ground or third space, expressing a range of understandings of quality in early childhood education (Dahlberg et al 1999; Fleer & Kennedy 2002; Gonzalez-Mena 1999; Grieshaber & Canella 2001a; Grieshaber 2000; Moss 2001; Pence 2001; Sheridan 2001; Viruru & Cannella 2001). Homi Bhabha (1990: 40) recognises the potential for transformation and hybridisation of ideas to occur in this middle ground:

> [it] is the 'third space which enables other positions to emerge'. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.

In the central area in Figure 1, in the space between the two extremes, a "mind (m-i-n-d) field" is represented. Pence (2001: 7) portrays this mind-field as "a constructive, creative and respectful space ... a place where ideas come together, and grow together". In taking up this space in the middle ground, an understanding of different points of view is enabled, not assuming one practice as superior to another approach, but rather providing opportunities for reflection.

Brown and Barrera (1999) also apply the concept of 'third space' in early childhood education. They see its role as vital to communication across cultural boundaries. "Suspending judgement and delaying resolution are critical preconditions for the emergence of 3rd space options" (Barrera & Corso 2002: 112). This means taking time for reflection and preparation for troubling experiences. The third space provides the opportunity for people with differing world-views to meet and evolve new meanings and understandings. Brown and Barrera (1999: 38) describe this way of understanding as presenting

challenges [us] to see both at once and thus allow the emergence of a
new pattern created by the integration of both images ... to see
reality as holographic: as a whole with every piece intricately
connected and containing aspects of all the others.

Moss (2001) suggests it is necessary for early childhood educators "to put a
stutter in this narrative, so we can hear other, quieter narratives telling very
different stories". All of these positions fit comfortably with an inclusive
understanding, which blurs cultural boundaries as bridges are erected across
the barriers.

Pence (2001) and his colleagues report their use of the space-in-between as a
beginning point for operating collaboratively with Canadian First Nations
people. Sheridan (2001: 15) also writes about the in-between as a space early
childhood professionals can elect to occupy if they have a willingness to share
knowledges and ideals:

> the concept of quality does not need to be fitted entirely within one of
> these two perspectives ... quality is not limited to the qualities of the
> object and/or the subjective experience of the user, but rather to the
> relation between them and how they interact with one another.

The explanations cited above, illustrated by the threads that interweave
between events in Figure 1, visualise quality in early childhood as a complex
and chaotic collection of ideas. Such a position is also articulated by Buell and
Cassidy (2001: 218):

> By adopting strategies and policies aimed at increasing quality, the
> complex dynamic nature of early care and education programs means
> that we cannot predict the outcome of any quality initiative. In the
> long term, these initiatives are likely to produce quality increase, but
> in the short term, turbulence and chaos are likely.

The middle ground provides a meeting place for local/subjective and global/objective knowledges and practices. The outcome of this intersection is explained by Featherstone (1996: 63).

> In many cases it may be that various forms of hybridization and creolization emerge in which the meaning of externally originating goods, information, and images are reworked, syncretized, and blended with existing cultural traditions and forms of life.

Dirlik (1996: 37) provides an industrial metaphor, to explain a similar conjunction in terms of 'local' and 'global' discourses.

> [t]he global factory is composed of thousands of concrete local situations – and that each of us, whatever setting we live and work in, can take small, accessible actions to confront our specific situations. By understanding that, every local story is part of a global "big picture", can open up a space for dialog and sharing of experiences – especially across barriers of language, nationality, gender, race and class.

Taking a position within the middle ground facilitated my understanding of the multilayered forces of tension in the interstices which exist in-between the local and global. Being a part of the m-i-n-d field limits the potential to undervalue the chaos of a local/global perspective, but it also opens up other sets of complexities, explored more fully below and in the final chapter.

Influence of accreditation in other sectors

Interest in quality systems had many beginnings, but became evident through systems of accreditation in a range of professions, institutions and in management generally, early in the twentieth century according to reports from Harcleroad (1983), Scrivens (1995) and Young (1983a). Enthusiasm for

the development of 'objective' instruments to measure performance and to produce a more accountable workforce were apparent in areas as diverse as health services (Scrivens 1995; Young 1983a), higher education (Allen 2000; Harman 1994; Young 1983a), more recently manufacturing industry (El-Khawas 1983; Sheldon & Biddle 1998) and much later, early childhood education. The impact of the quality movement in these sectors is briefly examined below.

Professional associations began to form amongst medical practitioners in the United States of America (USA) around the middle of the nineteenth century to "'protect' the developing professions and to combat fraud and low quality educational programs" (Harcleroad 1983: 42). These associations began to introduce measures to guarantee students had "particular kinds of experiences as prerequisite for professional practice ... They thought of themselves as voluntary accrediting bodies" (Harcleroad 1983: 42).

A consciousness of quality issues in the broader hospital and health services, as opposed to the medical profession, arose out of an 'objective' perspective (Scrivens 1995) which "defined these standards in specific, quantitative terms that were generally acceptable at the time" (Young 1983a: 6). Around 1910, systems of standards and accreditation became common in the USA where : "The Hospitals Standardization Programme ... [was] very obviously directed at creating an adequate environment in which doctors could practise their craft" (Scrivens 1995: 16-17).

Attempts were made as early as 1926 to introduce accreditation into Australian hospitals, however it took another fifty years to reach fruition. Scrivens (1995: 5) indicates that "[A]ccreditation systems began as the protectors of professionals", however another group within the health sector, the hospital administrators, perceived accreditation as a way to control professionals who worked within the institution (Scrivens 1995: 5). Even at these early stages of the quality movement, the impact of differences between stakeholder perspectives was evident.

In a review of accreditation in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, Scrivens (1995) notes two disparate systems in accreditation of health services. The first is an 'objective' approach, with fixed, defined understandings of quality, which are revised occasionally. This approach is open to scrutiny and exhibits demonstrable accountability to government and the general public. Such an approach reflects a belief that it is possible to identify the levels and standards of service provided to stakeholders. The second approach features a more 'subjective' understanding of quality, which is seen to "imply a continual process of self-examination, a never-ending search for improvement without a fixed destination" (Scrivens 1995: 26). The discontinuity between the two approaches in health accountability has led to tensions. A similar fracture occurs in early childhood education, based on opposing philosophies, as previously portrayed above in Figure 1.

Various approaches to quality have been the subject of research within the health sector, including Total Quality Management (TQM) systems. A study by Ovretveit (2001: 129) in six Norwegian hospitals finds "that quality methods alone were not enough. There was a need to develop technical excellence but also to develop the humanity of the service and the "spirit of quality". As an outcome of these findings the hospitals evolved Integrated Quality Development which Ovretveit (2001: 130) describes as

> getting the right balance between learning and using the new
> techniques, and learning new ways of relating ... rediscovering and
> practising the values and passion which brought people to learn the
> profession in the first place.

Ovretveit's report supports a contention that standards and regulations can be useful tools to guide staff in a technical manner towards quality practices under normal conditions. Nonetheless, because health organisations employ and serve people, involving multiple interactions and interdependent relationships, there are times when everything is fluid, and flexibility is required. Haun, Leach, Vivero & Fraser (2002: 459) explain:

> The majority of the processes in the health care environment can be planned and controlled according to known rules. Sometimes, when there is less agreement or certainty about what needs to take place, then we need to move away from our rule-based operation and recognize we are in the "zone of complexity".

This statement reflects the complex non-linear movements required in organisations providing direct care to people, and takes account of the cumulative and unpredictable nature of the process (Haun et al 2002). It is also noted by Hargreaves (2001) that there is a need for organisations to be aware of emotional experiences that affect identities and relationships amongst health and educational professionals.

In the manufacturing sphere, a precursor to accreditation appeared early in the twentieth century, when Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford demonstrated ways to control performance by top-down leadership systems which designated tasks to the workers and encouraged their participation via incentives or punishment (Sheldon & Biddle 1998: 165). The Ford Motor Company's first production line in 1910, signalled the beginning of TQM, according to Dahlgaard, Kristensen & Kanji (1998). These approaches, called the scientific management movement, have strong links to economic systems of change (Garcia-Souter 1999). Quality control began to emerge as a force in North American management thinking, initiated by Walter Shewhart and built on by William Edwards Deming (Agnayo 1990). Their work was largely ignored by industry in the USA, but not so in Japan, till some time after World War II (Beckford 1998).

Japanese management specialists, such as Taguchi and Ishikawa, are credited with being amongst the first to develop and apply quality systems of operating in industry (McLaughlin & Kaluzny 1999: 26). Much of the success of the Japanese quality movement is attributed to a striving to counter the devastating effects of World War II (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith

1999). The theories of Taguchi and Ishikawa were used to define and specify what it meant to produce a quality product or service:

> Corporate agendas stipulated that workers be responsible, flexible, enterprising problem solvers with appropriate communication skills, thinking skills and the capacity for life long learning wrapped up in team approaches to work organisations focusing on quality (Schied, Carter, Preston & Howell 1998: 159).

The rapid resurgence of Japan led other nations to look to similar models for organisational change (Schied et al 1998: 159). These management approaches included strategies to encourage workers to adhere and conform to quality guidelines. Objective definitions of quality continue to be prominent in industry, focusing on "'fitness to use' and 'conformance to standards'" (Schied et al 1998: 159). The term 'fitness of use' indicates an ability of a product or service to fulfil a prescribed purpose (Harman & Meek 2000b). In the USA to assure quality service and production, approaches such as Total Quality Management (TQM) became common around 1980 (Dahlgaard et al 1998). A critical analysis by Dennis (1995 cited in Schied et al 1998: 170) describes TQM as:

> an aggregate of techniques that normalize, modulate, model and work to totalize and render transparent fields of language, identity, perception and human relations ... to absorb and homogenize dissent and difference.

From within the early childhood field Dahlberg et al (1999: 89) point to a "search for certainty, unity and foundations" amongst the reasons for organizations continuing to adopt quality management systems. They warn however that such a focus can obscure, and in some cases even result in, the loss of meaning. A review by Senge et al (1999) of evaluative studies of approaches to quality within industry demonstrates that well over half of these projects do not attain their goals or are unable to maintain changes that are implemented. Senge et al (1999: 6) concludes: "[T]here is little to suggest that

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schools, health care institutions, government and non-profit institutions fare any better". He believes other methods can be more effective in achieving change by developing common communication channels:

> Shared commitment to change develops only with collective capability to build shared aspirations … [we must] recognize the importance of building learning capabilities as an essential part of producing more effective work practices … Activating the self-emerging commitment and energy of people around changes they deeply care about has been the key to the many successes that have been achieved.

Accreditation in higher education commenced in the USA as a self-regulating voluntary system towards the end of the nineteenth century in response to a perceived variance in program quality between universities (Harcleroad 1983). Precursors to accreditation were seen as early as 1787 in the State of New York. The concept of accreditation continued to emerge and develop from multiple sources. The initial focus was on "educational concerns and developing agreement on certain minimum standards related to educational resources" (El-Khawas 1983: 56). Over time the primary direction turned towards improving the quality of programs offered. After World War II (Harcleroad 1983: 50) reports that the USA federal and state governments began to jeopardise the process by using the outcomes of accreditation reviews to make decisions on eligibility for funding:

> The link between accreditation and federal eligibility is clearly a two-edged sword, for although it has given the institutional accrediting associations a visibility and clout they have never had before, it has also forced them into a quasi-public (some say quasi-governmental) role … [it] is not truly voluntary if they feel forced, either through political pressure or through the threat of losing eligibility for federal funds, to seek it and to abide by terms imposed by others that they would not agree to otherwise.

Kells (1995: 12) indicates that appropriation of accreditation to make funding decisions or to "enforce social policy" are contrary to "the basic nature of the process". Despite his criticisms of accreditation, Kells believes "the focus of self-evaluation and the encouragement of self-regulation" within higher education are positive elements. In reviewing the Scandinavian scene, Kells (1995) reports that their higher-education evaluations began as government initiatives, but moved to systems of self-evaluation.

Higher education institutions in Australia have conducted internal reviews of their systems for much of the twentieth century (Allen 2000; Harman 1994), with the core since the 1950s being self-evaluation, via a process of "self-study and validating peer review". Such a process assumes the organisation wants to achieve the goals set in the self-study (El-Khawas 1983). However, the self-accrediting process in Australian universities has been criticised by Anderson, Johnson and Milligan (2000) as not providing adequate benchmarks on which to compare the quality of courses across institutions.

Recently, Australian universities have turned to quality assurance or improvement systems (Anderson et al 2000, Dahlberg et al 1999; Shanahan 2002). Where early forms of accreditation were interested in inputs and standards, today, along with a change in terminology to quality assurance, the process focuses on "management processes and their effectiveness, the assessment of outputs and monitoring performance" and whether or not stakeholders' needs are met (Harman & Meek 2000a: 8). In his review of the literature of quality assurance in higher education, Shanahan (2002: 51) locates five common themes:

> There is no single or correct definition of quality; a perception of quality is the product of the person's life experience; different perceptions of quality are both inevitable and legitimate; perceptions of quality have changed over time and will continue to change; quality is determined by the stakeholders and their levels of satisfaction.

On the basis of his higher education research, Shanahan (2002: 42) concludes that stakeholders' perspectives hold the key to inform goal setting and that neither "maintenance" nor "improvement" in service quality is possible unless this data is available. Administrators who take multiple views from a range of stakeholders into consideration, report that quality assurance techniques can be useful management tools to improve the service quality within their sections of the university (Shanahan 2002). Support for the idea of multiple understandings also comes from Bensimon (1995: 595):

> I assume that categories such as "customer", "quality", and "satisfaction" have no fixed and intrinsic meaning, but rather that their meaning is produced locally by the culture, history, mission and power relations that mark the institution.

A consciousness of cultural issues is mentioned by Shanahan (2002: 48):

> Values and ideas are by and large a product of each person's experience … gender and race influence people's perception of quality by influencing their life experience (upon which understandings of quality are formed) … Different perceptions of quality are to be expected and accepted as valid and relevant.

Misuses and misconceptions of accreditation, Bender (1983: 72) indicates with reference to higher education, are primarily due to a lack of understanding of its purpose and as a "response to a variety of impulses and needs". Both Kember (2000: 187) and Bensimon (1995: 593) claim that approaches, such as Total Quality Management (TQM), are fashionable, though largely unevaluated, systems.

Despite such challenges by Connelly (1979) and in light of evidence emerging since the early 1990s (Senge et al 1999) that most change initiatives fail, organisations and governments continue to utilise accreditation or quality assurance systems. Senge et al (1999: 6) concludes, after a review of numerous evaluative studies, that the problem lies "in our most basic ways of

thinking". He argues that managers, such as preschool directors, will benefit from examining change initiatives from an ecological perspective. He likens organisational change to life cycles observed in nature and suggests "sustaining change requires understanding the reinforcing growth processes and what is needed to catalyze them and addressing the limits that keep change from occurring" (Senge et al 1999: 8).

The potential value of ecological frameworks in understanding organisations and the place of thinking and cognitive tools in the change process has become prominent across education in the last decade. The study in this thesis has adopted Davis' (1996: 58) explanation of ecology to understand the use of the term in education:

> *Ecology* is about interrelationships and interconnections. It involves an attunement of codependencies, mutual affects and codeterminations – in essence, to the fundamental intertwining of all things. When we speak of *ecology,* then we speak of everything that shapes our being – their effects on us and us on them.

This terminology is used cognisant of Bove's (1996: 382) warning that nature, and thereby through implication ecology, has "disappeared entirely within postmodernism". Rather Bove (1996) explains that nature may be seen to co-exist with culture, as integral to each other. Bove (1996: 385) has questioned whether postmodernism interrupts "the development of the perceptual apparatus needed to theorize the emergent and to take action to modify its development".

Davis and Sumara (1997) expand on earlier versions of the 'enactivist' model to explain the complexities of meaning making and learning in education. They indicate they were influenced particularly by Bateson (1979) and Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) whose research had links with the fields of anthropology, biology, ecology, evolutionary theory, neurology and phenomenology. Davis and Sumara's (1997: 191) see enactivism theory as:

a "complex fabric of relations", fundamentally and inextricably intertwined with all else – both physically/biologically and experientially/ phenomenologically … cognition does not occur in minds or brains, but in the possibility for shared action. … Truth and collective knowledge, for the enactivist, exist and consist in the possibility for joint action – and it is, necessarily, something larger than the solitary cognizing agent … the individual is understood to be a part of – a subsystem to – a series of increasingly complex systems.

Themes of multiplicity and fluidity are also apparent in critiques of accreditation as used in early childhood education. Using industry management and accountability paths such as accreditation in early childhood services has been challenged by Connelly (1979) and Dahlberg et al (1999). Connelly (1979) suggests it is unreasonable to make assumptions that there are causal links between a child's developmental achievements and the preschool curriculum. Such assumptions are apparent as common threads through QIAS in Australia. As a counter-strategy Connelly proposes that early childhood professionals adopt a position of "co-operative accountability" between the family and the preschool. Dahlberg et al (1999) highlight a need to move beyond the quality to explore the application of meaning making in early childhood education. This thesis seeks to build on the base established by Dahlberg et al (1999), by examining how adults learn in a preschool workplace.

Chapter 4 will relate how an ecological perspective can be used to enable unfamiliar quality issues to become more familiar in the context of an Aboriginal preschool. It is necessary to first examine the base from which quality assurance systems emerged in early childhood settings.

European precursors of quality movement in early childhood

In Europe, until the 1850s, accountability for the quality of prior to school experiences lay with the family. Up until the Industrial Revolution family

members shared that responsibility. From that time on, middle-class mothers provided informal experiences for children's learning when the father's work was situated away from the home. It was accepted that lower income families took their children to work or left them at home unattended (Ochiltree 1994). Formal education was considered inappropriate for children before the age of seven (Brosterman 1997) as these children's intellectual and social-emotional development was not deemed to be at an advanced enough stage for them to benefit from being in a learning environment.

What followed was the beginning of preschool education. No finite point has been established at which an interest in the principles of quality in education began, nor is it clear who was responsible for the origins of the profession of early childhood educator. The ideas of turbulence, or even chaos, in quality early childhood practice and administration are also not new. Feeney, Christensen and Mroavcik (1996) report instances of turbulence during the 1890s in the pioneer stages of the profession in the USA. Carmichael (2002) also shares examples of tensions, from the development stages of a branch of the Kindergarten Union in Australia.

When the Swiss pedagogue Johann Pestalozzi [1746-1827] began to write about 'natural' education and sensory experiential learning, his ideas were viewed as quite revolutionary. Feeney (1987: 12) argues that the profession of early childhood educator emerged in Europe from Pestalozzi's theory and practice. The elements central to this approach in relation to early childhood include:

> to be meaningful, all human activity must be self-generated; ...
> perception, developed by means of number, form and finally
> language, is the fundamental source of all learning; ... because
> children learn through active engagement, physical education,
> progressing from simple to complex movements ... must be included
> in the daily coursework; ... ethical and moral education develops
> from the trust and love that are first manifest between mother and
> child (Krusi 1875 cited in Brosterman 1997: 20-21).

Pestalozzi's philosophy, particularly in relation to nature, according to Brosterman (1997) had a profound influence on Friedrich Froebel [1782-1852]. However, it was Froebel who first coined the term 'kindergarten' (German for children's garden) to describe early education. Simon (1981: 140) indicates that Froebel wrote about children as:

> endowed with certain characteristics or qualities which will mature or flower given the appropriate environment. The child develops best in a 'rich' environment. The teacher must not interfere with this process of maturation, but act as a 'guide'.

Patty Smith Hill wrote in 1844 that "Froebel thought of the child as a tender flower and the school like a garden in which activities were planted" (cited in Moore 2002:18). Froebel's writings and practice emphasised the need for a mutually beneficial relationship between the teacher and the children. His perception of the importance of 'quality' is encapsulated in his motto: *"Last uns unsern kindern lehen* ... [translated as] something like "Let us live in an exemplary fashion for our children" (Brosterman 1997:20). He designed and provided detailed models of appropriate equipment to guide the children into "creative and open-ended activities" (Brennan 1998:14). He also included circle time and a rest period as integral parts of his program. From a local standpoint Froebel published, and taught his trainee teachers, a theory that established an international 'standard' as it spread across the globe. These standards included:

> using a creative and open-ended vocabulary ... a universal language, an equalizer to be implanted in children before their inexorable polarization by nationality and religion ... an education based on the comparison and reconciliation of opposites ... [and to] use elementary forms exclusively, and simple materials – as much as possible of these being prepared by the children themselves (Brosterman 1997: 99-100; Barnard 1859 cited in Brosterman 1997: 101).

Carmichael (2002: 23) indicates that Froebel "placed particular emphasis on unity and wholeness in [children's] development ... [they should be] given as much freedom as possible to develop without interference from their elders". Froebel put in place these 'standards of quality' when he established the first Kindergarten in 1837 (Carmichael 2002). The philosophy underpinning these standards is detailed in Froebel's texts: *The Education of Man* (1826 cited in Brosterman 1997) and *Mother Play and Nursery Song by Froebel* (Peabody 1878 cited in Moore 2002). The early childhood profession emerged from this initial stage with its first set of standards developed in Froebel's local preschool and taught to his trainee teachers. Froebel's ideals spread and were (re)interpreted, even "corrupted" (Brosterman 1997: 100), across much of the world. Kindergartens based on his philosophy became operational in Europe, Great Britain, North America (Brosterman 1997; Fenney, Christensen & Moravick 1987) and on to Australasia (Brennan 1998; Carmichael 2002; Waters 2002).

The strong influence of Froebel's theories on many of the pioneers of Australian early education is evident. Elizabeth Banks (1849-1933) for example, undertook Froebelian training in Germany before her 1886 appointment to teach in Sydney. Two years later Froebel's philosophy is apparent in a kindergarten methods course she conducted at the NSW Department of Education's training college (Clyde 1980).

Social activists, many of whom were also philanthropists or their innovative work supported by philanthropic organisations, were at the forefront of pioneering 'the profession' of early childhood education across much of the world. Detailed examples of philanthropic support are cited in Carmichael's (2002) history of the Kindergarten Union of South Australia (KUSA). Some social activists were among those appointed to the Kindergarten Union's colleges to train preschool teachers, whilst others became policy makers and/or advisers to government (Brennan 1998). Many were very strong advocates for the rights to social justice and better conditions, including early childhood education, for all families (Carmichael 2002).

In Australia during the late nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century these powerful individuals formed into professional groups such as the Kindergarten Union, to further their collective causes (Waters 2002). They spoke of the importance of ensuring that 'quality' services were provided. Amongst these pioneers was Maybanke Wolstenholme, who travelled to the United States of America towards the end of the nineteenth century to study preschool education (Brennan 1998:16). On Wolstenholme's return, together with her husband, Francis Anderson, she helped establish the Kindergarten Union (KU) in Sydney, with a primary aim to civilise the children of the poor "with middle-class values" and to "counteract the evil habits" (Brennan 1998:19).

Across Australia teacher training programs were conducted in colleges established and controlled by the Kindergarten Union standards, except in Tasmania (Brennan 1998). Ridie Lee Buckey, from the USA, was the first to direct the NSW training college for Kindergarten Union from 1897-1900. Her legacy to the profession, according to (Waters 2002: 37) was to establish the following principles or standards within Kindergarten Union:

> the importance of a three–year tertiary course for teacher education; the need to set a high standard; to work to achieve quality; and the need for special facilities for teacher education.

She shared elements of both of Froebelian ideals and of Dewey's 'progressive education' with her students during her Sydney appointment. This would suggest that even the early training curriculum operated in the m-i-n-d field or third space between Froebel's 'subjective' approach and the 'objective' ideals of Dewey's proponents. Froebelians' understandings of the education process hinged around "the unfolding and awakening of the essential nature of the child" (Brosterman 1997: 10); whereas prior to 1915 Dewey and his associates described education's effects as "the realization of potential and capacity resulting from interaction within the environment" (Brosterman 1997: 10). It has been acknowledged by Carmichael (2002: 24) that Dewey

modified Froebel's theory to achieve "more practical ends". However Carmichael (2002: 24) indicates that Dewey agreed "with Froebel's main thoughts and emphasis", which appears to be contrary to much of the dissonance implied between the two by Brosterman (1997).

In 1905 Lillian de Lissa (1885-1967) travelled to Adelaide with Frances Newton, principal of Sydney's training college, to demonstrate Froebelian principles (Carmichael 2002). Towards the end of 1905 de Lissa was appointed director of the first free kindergarten in South Australia and two years later established the teacher training program (Miller 2002). In 1911, de Lissa visited Perth to share her experiences, which prompted the establishment of the Kindergarten Union of Western Australia (Miller 2002). The University of South Australia continues to honour her contribution through the de Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies (Carmichael 2002).

In analysing the work of Australia's early childhood pioneers, Brennan (1998: 16) suggests that philanthropic pursuits and a drive towards reform of education practices were closely linked. This conclusion is illuminated by Ada a'Beckett (1939 cited in Brennan 1998):

> A cry for reform in education would have been at the time unheeded, but it was comparatively easy to arouse interest in the conditions of neglected children and their imminent danger of larrikinism.

Such a statement pinpoints the highly political nature of philanthropy and the profession (Power 2002b) in striving towards social reform and to normalising the rest of the population towards middle-class Anglo-Australian values. In this way the kindergarten movement can be seen as a base from which the importance of meeting 'quality' ideals was generated. Philanthropy was also an influential discourse in early childhood services for Aboriginal children (June Jeremy personal communication March 2003; Power 2002b).

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The Kindergarten Union in each state specified overall enrolment numbers, child to staff ratios in each session and staff training requirements, plus the physical features (fixed and loose) of the environment. The existence of separate regulations in each state signalled the emergence of fractures between Kindergarten Union policy and governments' perspectives on quality in early childhood services. However, the presence of these standards led to an expectation among stakeholders of quality ideals being met in programs offered to children prior to school entry (McCrea & Piscitelli 1991: 1).

Oversight of standards within Australian preschools was initially carried out by professional organisations such as the State Kindergarten Unions. When State and Territory governments started funding early childhood programs they took on this regulatory role. Aboriginal-controlled preschools, by contrast, have historically been funded by the Commonwealth. States which provided full funding for preschools also developed curricula to guide program development. Each preschool has its own policies and the programs were expected to be shaped by a curriculum. New South Wales and Victoria, whose preschools have been only partially government funded, have only recently taken on board state-wide curricula. In New South Wales and Victoria, the adoption of curriculum principles was advised but not made mandatory.

As governments sought to withdraw from the direct responsibility of providing early childhood services, they adopted standards and regulations followed by an investigation of systems of quality improvement and accreditation. Bender (1983: 75) suggests that governments have often used accreditation as "regulatory adjuncts". He also cited the use by governments of accreditation "as a potential vehicle for promoting social policies" and thus overshadowing quality improvement as the "primary purpose" (Bender 1983: 76). For Australia, the quality assurance system has enabled the privatisation of early childhood systems as the government has withdrawn from a provider to a regulatory role.

It has become a common practice among professional associations to "view accreditation as a means for establishing the legitimacy of their occupation as well as their association" (Bender 1983: 79). In the 1980s, Stonehouse (1990: 8) reports that several of the state branches of the professional association began to examine alternative approaches to ensure quality early childhood programs were provided. Links began to be forged by the Australian Early Childhood Association with the Commonwealth Government in an effort to raise the status of the profession and to have these ideals recognised by the wider Australian public.

At an international level, since 1990 Australia has been a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Nyland 1999). The Convention on the Rights of the Child has been of particular interest to Aboriginal educators, as it contains clauses that identify the rights of all children to equitable services without discrimination. Aboriginal educators see this framework as a valuable tool to lobby government to enact the stated principles. They are also conscious of the value of having a global body like the United Nations to oversee the implementation of the Convention (D'Souza 1999: 32).

Overseas influences on beginning early childhood practices

Australians in every field, including early childhood education, have been influenced by positive and negative elements of the quality assurance principles used in organisational development and change practices across the world. In relation to early childhood standards the profession has been particularly influenced by materials evolved in the USA (McCrea & Piscitelli 1991: 40; Sheridan 2001; Wangmann 1992a & b). In the embryonic phase of the profession, around the 1890s, a "period of ferment in the development of kindergartens" in the USA is reported by Feeney (1987: 15). She relates these conflicts to disparate philosophical views of the 'subjectivist' Froebelians versus the child study theorists in the 'scientific' or 'objective' movement,

such as Dewey*, Hall and Thorndike (Brosterman 1998: 101). Child study promotes a view of education as existing in a "measurable, scientific, logical world" (Townsend-Cross 2002:8). It produced such tools as normative charts, showing the milestones of children's development, based primarily on a white middle class group (Trawick-Smith 1997:29; Black & Puckett 1996: 23).

Patty Smith Hill, as an educator and professional leader, had an important influence on early childhood in the first quarter of the twentieth century (Weber 1970). During her training, Hill studied under Dewey and built on his progressive education philosophy. It was from this base that developmentally appropriate practice later stemmed (Greenburg 2001). Hill established the forerunner to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 1926, which had as its central goals:

> setting and promoting standards; providing opportunities for experts to exchange information about child development and education; and disseminating knowledge about children and what preschool education should provide (Greenburg 2001: 52).

Hill was "distressed by the proliferation of nursery school and day nurseries, some of them being launched by people who knew nothing about child development and learning" (Greenburg 2001: 51). The adoption of objective standards in the USA by their national association, was a starting point for the profession to control the quality of services offered to families. Similar concerns about standards of care were voiced in Australia around the same time. Following the USA lead, Australia formed its own national association in 1938, adopting the ideal of promoting quality services for children through the support and guidance of staff who worked in centres (Brennan 1998).

In England, early in the nineteenth century Robert Owen [1771-1858] established the "first infants school ... for children three to ten" (Fenney 1987: 38). However, preschools only came to public prominence during the

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* Note John Dewey significantly changed his philosophical view around 1915 (Prawat 2001: 667).

mid-1960s. At this time, the report to government from the Plowden Committee identified the positive effects of prior to school education. The Committee made particular reference to the positive impact of early education on children who were disadvantaged (Gray 1981: 83). The Plowden Report was criticised for setting impossible goals for teachers, such as recognising the uniqueness of individuals. For example, Simon (1981:140) claims: "this is far too complex and time consuming a role for the teacher to perform." It is also noted by Gray (1981: 88) that little support was forthcoming from government to equalise opportunities for disadvantaged children. He indicates that nursery school teachers typically lacked motivation to implement the reforms.

Project Head Start preschools, which included nutrition and health programs, were set up in the 1960s by the USA government. These preschools particularly targeted children with additional needs, based on a belief that intervention was most effective prior to school (Berk 2003). The consequences of Head Start have been something of a 'two-edged sword', with positive outcomes for many, but the project also "perpetuated deficit perspectives in ways that have permanently damaged others" (Cannella & Grieshaber 2001b: 180).

In Australia, preschool education up until the 1980s was a privilege, mostly enjoyed by limited numbers of children and "the great majority of these were of the middle-class" (Porter 1982: 21). There was little conscious recognition of different cultures to be seen in preschool programs throughout Australia (Ashby and Grieshaber 1996: 133):

> Prior to the 1970s ... there is no evidence that the relationship
> between culture and curriculum received any attention at all. In fact
> the belief that early childhood programs were 'content free'
> effectively precluded debate about the nature of the relationship
> between curriculum and culture.

In light of such finding, not unexpectedly, an examination carried out in 1973 for the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs of the educational resources being used in Australian schools, indicates that the materials were often inappropriate and racially biased. A follow up study in 1974 in South Australian schools reveals a similar picture (Lippmann 1986: 6). The erasure of the needs of families from cultures other than the mainstream led to significant cross-cultural tensions and explains why Aboriginal families elected not to use available services (O'Neil 1978).

Tensions in Australian Aboriginal education

Early childhood education for Indigenous peoples across the globe, has historically taken the form of sharing local cultures and values from one generation to the next. "These belief systems inform how we see ourselves, our land, our history and what it means to us" (Marika 1999: 108). The education of young Australian Aboriginal children has been the responsibility of the whole community (Bamblett 1991; Eastment & White 1998). Local groups perceive children as "offspring of the community, rather than belonging to the parents" (Bamblett 1991: 5). The community takes on a collective responsibility for the provision and outcomes of learning (Fasoli & Ford 2001). The Elders and other community members coordinate and direct the process and render each teacher accountable for the knowledges passed on (Marika 1999).

Since 1788, when Europeans first came to live in Australia, tension has existed between Anglicised versions of education and Aboriginal approaches to learning. Townsend-Cross (2002) suggests these differences disrupted Aboriginal communities when attempts were made to teach Standard English and religious studies to school aged Aboriginal children throughout the nineteenth century, and perhaps even earlier. When the children's parents became aware of what was being taught, many withdrew them from school (Blake 1977; Franklin 1976). Towards the end of the nineteenth century

racism was manifest in pressure put by Anglo-Australian families on State schools to exclude Aboriginal children (Rowley 1970 cited in Franklin 1976).

A crucial aspect of the tension between Aboriginal and European philosophies is explained by Brennan's (1998: 56) history of Australian early childhood education:

> Since white settlement Aboriginal families have endured extremely high levels of government and police intervention in their lives. Policies such as the forced removal of children from their families and communities (which was pursued in some parts of Australia until the late 1960s) have left a legacy of suspicion and distrust of authorities.

Mason (1997: 12) explains the situation a little differently:

> Since European settlement much mainstream education for Aboriginals has focused on integrating them into the dominant European society and minimising their language and culture … education, as for many other areas of Australian life, is problematic in content and process for Aboriginals, whose original culture is fundamentally different from the individualistic, western, capitalist orientation of mainstream Australia.

There is little mention in the literature of the provision of formal prior to school education until the 1960s. However the Aboriginal movement had been pressuring governments for several decades to have their cultural validity recognised (Lippmann 1986). The pressure for provision of services to families was led in Sydney by prominent Aboriginal leaders such as Mum Shirl and Maisie Cavanagh (June Jeremy personal communication March 2003). When support was not forthcoming from government, help was sought from international philanthropic groups to fill some of the gaps in services for young children. Two of the principal international philanthropic organisations involved were the Save the Children Fund, which had its headquarters in

Great Britain, and the Bernard van Leer Foundation, whose based was in the Netherlands. Such organisations operated largely outside of the control of governments, and had the flexibility to fund projects that were not politically popular (Leat 2003).

Aboriginal preschools, and family education centres were set up, by these means in the 1960s. Whilst Save the Children Fund and the Bernard van Leer Foundation had the stated aim of doing good for the less fortunate (Save the Children 2002), the two organisations worked quite differently. Save the Children Fund operated the services they funded, employed staff and generally had direct and day-to-day oversight of the programs that were being implemented. The Bernard van Leer Foundation funded local groups to develop projects, with oversight largely via detailed evaluation and accountability procedures (June Jeremy personal communication March 2003).

The Preschools established by Save the Children Fund during the assimilation era in government Aboriginal policy, appointed trained non-Aboriginal early childhood educators as directors. They were expected to share Anglo-Australian norms with their Aboriginal pupils. The untrained staff in these preschools were appointed from the local Aboriginal community and guided in their work by the directors. Dianne Roberts (personal communication March 2003), the current Principal of Minimbah, who worked then as a teaching assistant in the Armidale Save the Children Fund Preschool, states the assimilationist notions of the programs were based on what the organisation understood was best for the children at the time.

Staff of New South Wales Save the Children Fund preschools were brought together from throughout the state once a year to update their knowledge of quality practices at training conferences. Between conferences, Save the Children Fund had an inspector visit regularly to check that the preschools and the children were clean and tidy. She also closely examined the educational activities and the nutrition program (Helen Evans personal communication September 2002). After approximately 30 years of direct

involvement Save the Children Fund were directed by the NSW Government to transfer the management of these services to the local Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal Preschool at Coffs Harbour was the first Save the Children Fund unit to become operational in New South Wales in 1961. It became known as Kulai when the local community took control in 1990 (Pam Mitchell personal communication 2002).

The Bernard van Leer Foundation contributed significant funds and "professional guidance to set up community-based initiatives in early-childhood care and education" (Jeremy 1991a: 4) for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families (Power 2002b). A number of Aboriginal Family Education Centres were set up, with grants from the Foundation. The Aboriginal Family Education Centres were modelled on a program developed by Lex Grey with Maori families in New Zealand. He was invited to come to Australia and work with local communities to mould programs with Aboriginal families, which had a "goodness of purpose for their particular environment, circumstances and needs" (June Jeremy personal communication March 2003). The Aboriginal Family Education Centres community development projects, are described by Lippmann (1986: 5), as providing a significant turning point in achieving some equity in early childhood services:

> Perhaps the main contribution of the AFECs [Aboriginal Family Education Centres] was their acceptance of the values and experiences of Aboriginal people, whom they did not regard as disadvantaged and the fact that families were invited to teach and learn together, encouraging both individual and community growth.

Maisie Cavanagh said recently "because Aboriginal Family Education Centres encouraged growth and awareness of Aboriginal families, today they are still participating and involved at a local level, responding to moves to make change" (June Jeremy personal communication April 2003).

Other local programs in remote areas of Australia received significant funds from the Bernard van Leer Foundation from the mid-1980s. The professional development input provided by the Foundation included detailed instructions, which often followed closely Western norms. In a wider context of Aboriginal self-determination, control of these programs was transferred to the local peoples. A possible reason for Aboriginal services severing their links with the Foundation related to differences and inflexibility over local organisational control and ownership (June Jeremy personal communication March 2003).

Early childhood special services came to prominence across Australia in the seventies. These services were "united in their desire to provide a quality service to the diverse communities of Inland Australia" (Jeremy 1991a: 4). In the mid-1970s the Remote and Isolated Children's Exercise (RICE) Mobile in South Australia (Kendal 1991). CONTACT was established in New South Wales (Jeremy 1982; 1991b) and in Queensland the Uniting Church began to operate mobile services. These services grew out of an awareness of the need to provide quality professional support and culturally appropriate resource materials to early childhood educators and families working in rural and urban centres where preschools were not available (Carmichael 2002). Other states followed with similar services.

In developing programs for Aboriginal families it was recognised they were "among the most isolated people" in New South Wales (Jeremy 1982: 18). Support was the primary role of the women who operated these services, who met up with isolated families in local communities (Jeremy 1991b). Stakeholders perceived these organisations "as a bridge between isolated families and resource people and services at a local, regional and metropolitan level" (Kendal 1991: 40). The success of these operations grew out of the strong and effective communication links forged between the local communities, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and the core staff.

The Australian Government's (1985) House of Representatives Committee on Aboriginal education recognised the significant contribution of preschool

education to the children's development and readiness for school. The report stressed the importance of the quality education programs which were relevant to "Aboriginal needs and values" (Lippmann 1986: 5). Problems of access and availability of appropriate preschool education and resources to Aboriginal children were reported.

When the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care (SNAICC) met in Canberra to consider the United Nations draft Declaration of the Rights of the Child, human rights issues were introduced into the quality debate (D'Souza 1999: 31):

> [The declaration] would give the Federal Government the ability to set minimum standards for the promotion, protection and development of children's rights across the country and would provide the focus for a significant review and evaluation of the programs for children which are provided by the various levels of government.

This statement, whilst referring in particular to the UN charter, gave assent to the principle of Commonwealth government oversight of the quality of all early childhood services across the country.

Standards or standardisation

Over time, standards, regulations, and principles of quality have evolved and had normative effects on preschool education via local, regional, state, national and international public policies. The 'objectivist' perspective has been accepted as a given in many quarters of the profession. The protagonists of this approach state that these policies are not meant to "dominate[d] in the interests of power, but to be educated and solicited into a kind of alliance between personal objectives and ambitions and institutionally or socially prized goals and activities" (Rose 1990 cited in McLeod 2001: 262). Other groups, operating with a 'subjectivist' approach, read 'quality' instruments

quite differently. From around the 1990s this group worked actively to reconceptualise early childhood and has questioned maintenance of the status quo. When instruments such as QIAS are implemented, McLeod (2001: 281) suggested there was a need to weigh up the aspects that were valuable and those that were not:

> If all public policy is understood as governmental, implicated in managing populations and inciting modes of subjectivity, then we need to consider on what ethical basis we distinguish between desirable and undesirable government practices.

A century after the early childhood profession began, discussions continue about care versus education in relation to quality. These interchanges become so vigorous in Australia that Stonehouse (1990b: 7), names early childhood as "a profession full of tensions". At the annual conference of the Australian Early Childhood Association (AECA) in 1989, Stonehouse urges the profession to engage with this tension in a constructive manner and utilise the opportunity for reflection and growth. She identifies the controversy surrounding accreditation as an area the profession should debate (Stonehouse 1990b). Farquhar's (1990: 17) research also identifies the study of quality as a "step onto a minefield". She supports the view that there has been an over-reliance on experts and recommends investigating approaches that are relevant at the local level.

Early childhood quality systems

Quality continues to be an issue in the development of the profession. Instruments such as the Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics, licensing standards, plus early childhood teacher education curricula at universities and TAFE colleges, child protection laws at local, state, national and international levels, seek to control the quality of early childhood services. The interplay of this range of criteria, however presents challenges, which include tension between minimum standards approaches versus efforts to achieve excellence

(Morgan 1994). Another challenge is that new quality assurance instruments are often superseded before they have time to be implemented (McLaughlin & Kaluzny 1999).

In 1984 the early childhood profession in the USA adopted a voluntary accreditation system (NAEYC 1984). The choice to self-regulate was a highly valued element of accreditation in the USA, that has been "somewhat eroded" by links to government (Harcleroad 1983: 37) "in the name of accountability" (Scrivens 1995: 13). The evaluation criteria were derived from a range of quality assurance instruments and associated research (Wangmann 1992b). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) criteria were developed over several years by "reviewing practices and documents; revising drafts based on specialist recommendations; critiquing of a draft in *Young Children;* commenting at open hearings; and, field testing across the country" (McCrea & Piscitelli 1991: 7).

In the USA at around the same time Harms and Clifford (1980) developed the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) as a self-evaluation tool. ECERS evolved from a combination of research and practical experience. An examination of ECERS by Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson (2001:173) reports its use to:

> define[s] levels of quality in typical preschool situations ... Beneath those criteria of quality lie assumptions of what constitutes quality in pre-school and of how different levels of quality are embedded in pedagogical processes.

For accreditation to fulfil its potential it needs to support the organisation "to evaluate and improve its educational offerings" (Young 1983a: x). It has been suggested by Bender (1983) that this can be achieved by the use of self-study as the primary focus of accreditation. Kells (1983: 121) describes self-study as "useful and change-orientated" if it is initiated locally rather than applied by an "external force".

During the 1980s Australian researchers investigated how systems of accreditation could be adapted to fit this country's "best practice". The Victorian branch of AECA conducted a pilot study utilising the NAEYC principles, supplemented by extra criteria framed around daily routines (Williams & Ainley 1994). McCrea and Piscitelli's (1989) research, funded by the Queensland Government, resulted in the publication of the *Voluntary Accreditation of Early Childhood Programs in Queensland*. This model integrates parent consultation into the review process.

> a planning, monitoring and evaluating guide for those professionals wanting to learn more about the quality of their early childhood programs ... developed in consultation with local, national and international early childhood professionals. In Queensland, we consulted widely with early childhood educators, parents and other interested parties about what constituted a professionally respectable standard of service for young children in group settings (McCrea and Piscitelli 1991: 2)

State and Commonwealth policy makers came together to conduct a *Functional Review of Child Care* (Wangmann 1995: 45). The Crawford Committee subsequently made "recommendations for a system that would, over time, improve quality and complement state and territory licensing regulations" (Wangmann 1995: 93). The Interim Accreditation Council began its work in 1991, with a membership drawn from all sectors of the early childhood industry. The interim council's work led to tensions between the public and private sector regarding the requirements to conform to universal sets of quality assurance practices (Bryce 1996). In 1993 the National Childcare Accreditation Council published the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Handbook based on research, experience and extensive consultation (NCAC 1993). Three primary reference sources were acknowledged in the development of the QIAS Handbook (NCAC 1993: 108):

The National Academy of Early Childhood Programs (USA), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Harms and Clifford 1980, 1984) and Voluntary Accreditation of Early Childhood Programs in Queensland (McCrea & Piscitelli 1990).

Supporters of QIAS spoke at Australasian early childhood conferences in the mid-1990s espousing accreditation with great fervour, particularly in relation to how it would lift the quality of services to children across Australia (Bryce 1996). Support also appeared in the Australian early childhood literature (Wangmann 1992a & b; 1995). An external review of QIAS was conducted by Coopers and Lybrand Consultants a year after its implementation. In commenting on the report Bryce & Johnson (1995: 4) highlighted the positive findings:

> The evaluation found that overwhelmingly, 'centres believed that they had improved their quality of care for children since participating in the QIAS. Participation in the process of self-study were the most important factors associated with quality of childcare (Executive Summary, p.7).

Bryce & Johnson (1995: 4) also listed the negatives cited by centres:

> time and money; trying to get parents involved in the process; finding the time to organise and carry out meetings; extra paperwork involved; extra pressure on staff to cope with extra workloads and self-study; getting started; lack of other people to confer with about the process and the approaches to use; and repetition within some policies.

The external review was criticised by Murray (1996) in terms of its failure to critique a number of problems in the research design and the content of the evaluation.

Application of the products of quality improvement and accreditation to early childhood education, of necessity involves the use of 'objectivist' approaches, to develop and measure the service. With this viewpoint comes an expectation that accreditation instruments have the ability to identify and describe quality. For example, QIAS proponents claimed the system provided criteria to evaluate accurately the level of service at high quality, good, basic and sub-standard levels.

By contrast, some researchers describe the goals of QIAS as unreachable due to the complex nature of the quality process. Farquhar (1990: 20) states: "New evidence suggests that to seek a complete and valid list of key indicators is probably not possible and a scientifically unacceptable endeavour". Smith (2002: 118) suggests that "all measurement by its nature is inexact". An "exact science – describes something that has never – and never will – exist" (Smith 2002: 178). Instruments based on flawed principles, claims Lewis (2002: 179), have the potential to "narrow the whole enterprise and could halt the development of truly significant developments in teaching and learning". Significant time is consumed and additional costs are incurred in mounting processes of accreditation, such as professional development activities, changes to physical facilities, alterations to administrative procedures and canvassing stakeholders views (Hussian 2002). If organisations become involved in accreditation for the wrong reasons, Young (1983b: 35) reports the outcomes will be less than cost effective:

> accreditation is just too expensive to be relegated to a category of swallowing hard every so often and then rejoicing that the review process is over for a few more years.

The consequent changes QIAS fosters can create significant tensions, resistance and resentment (Jackson 1996; Lewis 2002; Murray 1996). Twelve reasons for people resisting change are identified by Tobin (1999: 6) including: increasing workload, reasons given not believed, past failures, loss of income, difficulty of working with new people, difficulty learning new things, content with status quo, people lack understanding of changes, fear of

obsolescence, fear of unknown, tried previously without success, and a perception of not being listened to. Other reasons for hostility against involvement in accreditation, include time subtracted from activities with the children, program preparation or with their own families (Hussain 2002). Research by Lyons (1997) identifies that an average of 100 hours unpaid overtime was involved for each centre in implementing the QIAS system.

A study by Jackson (1996: 20) amongst 50 long day care centres in Sydney seeks to gauge the affect of the implementation of QIAS on working conditions. Results show support for the accreditation process, but identify "high stress levels, lack of time to carry out expected changes and inadequate rations" as significant challenges. Whilst critics of accreditation do not deny the importance of accountability for public funds, research findings point to a need to examine QIAS with multiple lenses, to identify positive aspects of the process that could be extracted and used to further develop understandings of quality processes (Fleer & Kennedy 2002).

Reconceptualising quality

From the mid-twentieth century interest emerged in alternate ways of understanding quality issues in Australia, but much more discussion was apparent on the other side of the world. These educators had "a genuine concern for diverse human beings, diverse voices, and the power that allows some to be heard and not others" (Cannella & Grieshaber 2001a: 25). In the USA, Jipson (2001: 28) indicates that the process of reconceptualising early childhood education began in 1987 in her discussion with Shirley Kessler at the conference of the American Educational Research Association. According to Moss (1999) in Europe the movement towards reconceptualisation of early childhood, was sparked by a post-World War II restructuring of traditional practices in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. These changes were lead by Loris Malaguzzi [1920-1994], an educator and philosopher, who for many years directed the Reggio Emilia project (MacNaughton & Williams 1998).

The impact of this rethinking of practice, Dahlberg (1995 cited in Dahlberg et al 1999: 121) suggests, stimulated change across the profession:

> Reconstructing and redefining children's and teachers' subjectivities ... As I see it, all of this was possible because Malaguzzi was extremely familiar with the field and its traditions; but he also had the courage and originality to choreograph his own thinking.

Early childhood educators from across the world, beginning in the 1980s, went to listen and study the Reggio Emilia approaches to learning. Dahlberg et al (1999: 123) describes these complex processes as: "offering a new vision, with the prospect of a new freedom, a new political culture, Reggio has become a new social movement and has created a new university."

Kantor and Fernie (2001: 38) explain that:

> Exploring the work of educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy ... helped us to reconceptualize our current agenda. Partly by looking into "the mirrors" of another culture, we have been prompted to re-examine our existing frameworks for practice and to identify new educational possibilities as well.

Johnson (2001a: 40) describes reconceptualisation in relation to the performance involved.

> The act of moving in and out of silence and moving away from ignorance, are what enthuse me most about the reconceptualization movement ... I find it liberating to "disrupt how we 'tell the truth' about ourselves and others" (Popkewitz and Brennan 1998 cited in Johnson 2001a).

The global influence of reconceptualization on quality practices in early childhood emerged at the 1989 UNICEF International Child Development ECCD seminar. It developed further when the European Commission

Childcare Network met in Spain in 1990. At this conference professionals from much of Europe discussed the criteria and practices needed to facilitate access to high quality services for all children (Balladeer et al 1990 cited in Ochiltree 1994). As a result of this m-i-n-d field exercise participants reached the conclusion that: "Understanding quality and arriving at indicators is a dynamic and continuous process of reconciling the emphases of different interest groups. It is not a prescriptive exercise" (Balaguer et al 1990 cited in Ochiltree 1994: 39). Through an examination of aspects of the quality movement from a position within the third space it is possible to visualise the multiple layers and perspectives of a range of stakeholders. This reflection on past and present practices create space for new knowledges and reconceptualisations to emerge.

At the 1996 UNICEF International Child Development ECCD conference several papers criticised the objectivist stance of providing a universal picture of the child (Dahlberg et al 1999: 162). At this conference, Save the Children UK acknowledged that some of research confirmed the influence of culture and context on a child's performance. They warned "there is a danger in thinking that one can find universal solutions to social questions" (Molteno 1996 cited in Dahlberg et al 1999: 163). Major reconceptualization conferences were next conducted by Regional ECCD Institutes in Africa and South East Asia, with the support of UNICEF. These conferences explored multiple ways in which quality practice could be enacted. Pence (1998: 20), a workshop leader at the conferences, drew out the human rights implications of quality assurance systems:

> I am increasingly concerned that ECCD … quest for "Best" and "Appropriate" practices can undermine not only indigenous practices, but also the confidence of communities to actively plan for the care and well-being of their children.

Reconceptualising and deconstructing concepts of quality assurance allows the profession to consider anew the many possible ways quality can be envisioned (Cannella & Grieshaber 2001a & b). Perhaps it also helps to

ensure a less rigid application of instruments, such as QIAS, in individual early childhood centres, allowing interpretations of the principles in terms of local knowledge and early childhood practices.

Reconceptualising Indigenous early childhood education

Research conducted at Meadow Lake in Canada by First Nations people, in collaboration with Pence and the team from University of Victoria, demonstrates how recognising complexity can generate new practices for Indigenous communities and teacher educators. Pence's (1998) reconceptualization began in 1988 when his team at the University of Victoria, were approached to operate in partnership with First Nations people from the Meadow Lake Tribal Council in Canada. The Elders wanted to work cooperatively with the university to conduct teacher training programs within and relevant to their communities. A major aim was to train First Nation teachers who would share knowledges and skills with their children to operate effectively in their culture, as well as in the western culture that surrounded them (Dahlberg et al 1999).

The Elders perceived the university's lack of an operational early childhood curriculum as a positive base to begin their relationship (Dahlberg et al 1999: 170). As in Australia, Canadian First Nations peoples had long been impacted by years of assimilationist colonial education and were keen to avoid perpetuating such an approach (Agbo 2002; Pence 1998). The impact of such intervention, Pence (2001: 5) stated, was that

> [M]ost of these "externally designed interventions" were deemed "Best Practice" in their time and had both popular and professional support – and all contributed greatly to these peoples' undoing – to their suffering. [The tension continues when these two very different world views meet today] … Many of those who played a part in this cultural genocide were not mean spirited, nor did they see themselves

as "oppressors" – for many their aim was "to do good", to set the child on a "better path".

Pence (1998: 48) points to the university's position of 'not knowing' as pivotal to initial engagement, (re)establishment and maintenance of relationships of trust with the Meadow Lake community (Dahlberg et al 1999: 170). 'Not knowing' provided an opening on which to build a curriculum bridge which spanned two cultures (Ball and Pence 1999: 48) and facilitated community members to "walk in both worlds" (Pence 1998: 28).

The Elders identified the importance of positive knowledges transmitted in the training programs: "We must rediscover our traditional values of caring, sharing, and living in harmony and bring them into our daily lives and practices" (Ray Ahenakew 1988 cited in Ball & Pence 1999: 47). The Elders also adopted a position of not knowing: "As tribal council staff, we could not make the error of walking into any of the community to show them the correct and only way of doing things" (M R Opekokew & M McCallum 1994 cited in Ball & Pence 1999: 47).

A feature of the Meadow Lake project was acceptance that the First Nations peoples and University of Victoria personnel had knowledges both could contribute. The Meadow Lakes peoples brought their "unique culture, values, practices, and sometimes its language, and its vision of what optimal child development looks like and how to facilitate healthy development" (Ball & Pence 1999: 48). The University staff brought "largely middle-class Euro-North American … theory, research and practical approaches to early childhood education" (Ball & Pence 1999: 47). Through a process of co-participation, intertwining learning, sharing their analyses of curriculum materials, everyone gained new knowledges from the experience.

Since the compensatory education era of mid-1960s, the importance of quality education for First Nations peoples has been a matter of concern throughout Canada. In the Meadow Lake area the increased presence of local, appropriately trained teachers continues to have a significant impact on the

educational services delivered to the children and families (Ball & Pence 1999). Another six First Nations organisations have used the Meadow Lake model as a base for developing their own frameworks, appropriate to the local context (Dahlberg et al 1999: 167).

However, in other parts of Canada, Agbo (2002) suggests the situation in education is less than satisfactory. He attributes the problem to the rush to give control to First Nations communities without the human or material resources to implement a system of adequate quality. For example, in Ontario ninety-three per cent of teachers in First Nations schools are non-Indigenous and have little understanding of the culture in which they work (Taylor 1995 cited in Agbo 2002). Limited outcomes will continue Agbo (2002: 281) asserts

> unless there is a genuine devolution that entails the empowerment of First Nations communities to provide an education that is specifically suited to each community, schools for Aboriginal children will remain mediocre in quality.

The Canadian system of accountability also expects that "First Nations schools and their teachers continue to measure the quality of education by the gauge of the European-Canadian society and analyse it in the unit of mainstream standards" (Agbo 2002: 293). This demonstrates the need to investigate if similar challenges become evident in Aboriginal early childhood education in Australia when QIAS is implemented.

Australian quality improvement and accreditation system

The Putting Children First: Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) was first applied in 1994 to long day care services across Australia. Participation in QIAS at that point was a condition of receiving the Commonwealth Government's Childcare Assistance (NCAC 1993: i) for all but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centres (Burden 1999). QIAS was

administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) with funds and support from the Minister for Family Services, Canberra. The objectives of the system were:

> To ensure that children in long day care centres have stimulating, positive experiences and interactions which will foster all aspects of their development (NCAC 1993: I).

The system contains 52 principles, encompassing four sectors of the operation of an early childhood centre's operation: interactions; the program; nutrition, health and safety practices; centre management and staff development. The QIAS handbook (NCAC 1993) identifies five steps in the program: registration with NCAC; staff and parents' self-study; external review by a knowledgeable peer; recommendation by three moderators based on information from centre's self-study report and peer review; a decision made by the NCAC on basis of moderators' report. Self-study is central to the quality improvement process. Bender (1983: 80) has described self-study as

> the cornerstone whereby professionals in the institution try to "look in the mirror" and see what is, as opposed to what their purposes and goals would indicate ought to be.

From an aggregation of staff and parent's responses to written self-study questionnaires the Director produces the centre's report which is validated, or otherwise, by the visit of a peer who observes and documents the program in operation. The reviewer's and director's reports are examined by a panel of three moderators to decide if National Childcare Accreditation Council will accredit a centre for three years, two years or one year, according to the assessed quality of the program. If accreditation is denied, a plan of action is constructed with the centre for further development and later reassessment.

Reconceptualising QIAS

The primary aim of the QIAS process is to put the children first and to see the experience from their perspective (NCAC 1993). Only limited evaluative research has ever focused on the adults' experience of QIAS and the complexities of organisational change as integral parts of the quality assurance process. The value of conducting research in conjunction with the accreditation process has been affirmed by Young (1983c). In the field of early childhood Dahlberg et al (1999) have called on the profession to rethink the manner and basis on which quality assurance instruments are used.

Early childhood educators have contributed some analyses of the QIAS experience for adults (Jackson 1996; Lyons 1997; Murray 1996). Critical analyses of the reconceptualization of early childhood education have come from studies by researchers such as Cannella & Grieshaber (2001a & b); Dahlberg et al (1999), Evans (2000), Fleer & Kennedy (2002), Ochiltree (2000), Moss (2001), Pence (2001), Power (2002), and Viruru & Cannella (2001). They raise a range of issues including power, feminism, politics, speaking positions, race, subjectivity, communication, and complexity from the multiple perspectives of early childhood workers. Seven years after the publication of QIAS, Fleer and Kennedy (2002: para. 17) note:

> There have been reports from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups that the QIAS is too rigid for their communities as they try to develop services that reflect their particular social and cultural perspectives. While there was a notional consultation process during the development of the Accreditation system, the system clearly represents a Western view of the world, which makes it difficult for centres to address issues concerned with cultural diversity and the inequity of life chances for children.

In a report on the capacity to meet specific standards for accountability in a health services workplace Rappolt, Mitra & Murphy (2002: 295) examined

professional development, evidence based practice and quality assurance. Their findings indicated that many professionals are highly motivated to continue learning but are often discouraged by workplace barriers. Peer mentoring, appropriate monitoring and feedback on practice were suggested as ways to facilitate learning. No longitudinal data is available which describes the complex experience of accreditation in early childhood.

Language issues in self-study

Prior to the development phase of QIAS, Farquhar (1990: 19) warned the Australian profession to be conscious of "cultural and philosophical" diversity. She also pin pointed: "diversity of aims and goals of early childhood education and care" to be a primary "barrier to being sure what quality means" (Farquhar 1990: 18). The way language is used in documents, according to Barrera and Corso (2002: 106) can assist people to feel ownership and included.

> Only when diverse skills and knowledge are accurately perceived as what they truly are – valued and deep rooted expression of self and community – can differences be respected without sacrificing connections.

Ownership of any workplace change process begins to build only when people understand how questions asked or statements made relate to their workplace. Where confusion exists, perceptions of alienation and marginalisation are likely to follow (Barrera and Corso 2002). Exclusion can often occur unconsciously when the people who construct accreditation documents are so familiar with words that they automatically assume their readers or listeners have the same vocabulary. Senge et al (1999: 333) advocates a bicultural approach to communicating quality assurance terms to staff:

developing an awareness of one's language is a high leverage strategy in becoming effectively bicultural. It is also why explaining complex ideas in the most simple and accessible manner has always been the hallmark of great leadership.

In dialogue with others there is the opportunity for modifications based on the needs and understanding of participants (Barrera & Corso 2002; Brown & Barrera 1999; Stewart 2002). With print language, once the material is in text form much of the flexibility available in personal communication is lost. The challenge to structure the QIAS print materials to communicate with all Australian parents or staff working in early childhood centres is immense. That the language in the questionnaires, handbook and workbook does not fulfil the goal of communicating widely therefore is not a surprise.

Problems of language are generally compounded across cultures, as each person has some unique expressions and styles attached to her or his identity, which tend to be reflected in communication (Barrera & Corso 2002; Johnson 2002; Stewart 2002). An awareness of bi-culturalism in identity-negotiation processes, such as in the self-monitoring mentioned above, can facilitate understanding and accommodation of diversity. Understanding takes time and a willingness to negotiate across "cultures, ethnic groups, social classes, and historical backgrounds does not come naturally" (Johnson 2002: 522). When the skilled dialogue approach described by Barrera and Corso (2002) and Brown and Barrera (1999) is adopted as integral to early childhood practice, boundaries become blurred between people of different cultures. This blurring enables "respectful, reciprocal and responsive interactions, both verbal and non-verbal, across diverse cultural parameters" (Barrera & Corso 2002: 103).

In recent years researchers have begun to deconstruct and reconceptualise the processes surrounding quality measures, such as the QIAS (Dahlberg et al 1999). As educators and policy makers become more flexible and culturally responsive in the application of the principles of QIAS, early childhood centres may benefit. Services may elect to develop their own local system of performance review to meet the particular needs of their community.

During the year 2000 twenty-five early childhood services, (preschools, mobiles and occasional care centres), participated in a pilot study of QIAS funded by the NSW government. At this point the report evaluating the outcomes of the larger study has not yet been made public (Louise Dungate personal communication July 2003). Chapter 3 of this thesis reports on the experience of implementing QIAS at Kulai as one of the participant preschools. Brief anecdotal evidence from four other pilot study participants, is interwoven with the Kulai data.

Conclusion

This review of the literature surrounding the quality movement, reveals that the process and understanding of the term, quality assurance, has been emerging and reconceptualising itself in some areas of organisational development for more than 100 years. Health services, higher education and the manufacturing industry were amongst the first to develop systems of quality accreditation. These early systems have provided models for later systems in these and other fields.

Professional associations have long played significant roles in establishing and overseeing standards at a national or global level. The medical profession developed some of the earliest national mandatory systems. Universities began with voluntary local systems and until very recently have jealously guarded the right to conduct their own reviews.

Since the early childhood education profession began in the nineteenth century there has been interest in the quality of programs offered to families with young children prior to school. Early in the twentieth century the Kindergarten Union played an important role in overseeing standards in Australian prior to school education. Just over twenty years ago formal systems of quality improvement and accreditation began to be introduced to early childhood education. Among the first was a voluntary system produced

by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the USA. The QIAS drew on NAEYC and ERCS as bases to frame quality principles in Australia.

Some systems of accreditation have, in recent years, come to be known as quality assurance schemes. Support for such approaches to organisational management has come from early childhood professionals who operate from an 'objectivist' perspective. A segment of the profession is far more 'subjective' in its understanding of the quality process in early childhood education. Some early childhood professionals situate themselves and their thinking in the space-in-between the objective/subjective approaches to education. In this third space or m-i-n-d field, a group of early childhood professionals have interacted to re-consider the many possible ways quality can be envisioned.