Researching contemporary ECEC in Australia: Quo vadis?

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1. What does a quality program look like?

2. The benefits of high-quality programs

3. The Australian challenge
The evolution starts here.
ANTARCTICA in The Early Learning Centre

THE EVOLUTION STARTS HERE
What is diamond dust?
Do icebergs have a heart?
Can you go in an iceberg?

How does water get out of a whale’s spout?
Young children learning: quality of program

ANTARCTICA DVD
High-quality programs

Specialist....

- Content and pedagogy
- Focused (goal driven) interactions
- Valid, learning-focused curriculum
- Skilled professional teams
- High expectations
- Reflexive processes

*Quality underpins positive ECEC program effects*
Karoly & Bigelow (2005)

The economics of investing in universal preschool in California.

**Benefit allocations**

- State and local government
- Federal government
- Program participants
- Rest of society (non-participants)

**Benefit categories**

- Remedial education and education attainment
- Child welfare
- Criminal justice
- Compensation and taxes
- Value of child care
Karoly & Bigelow (2005)

The economics of investing in universal preschool in California.
Barnett (2008) favours universally offered high-quality public provision because:

- **Targeting is imperfect**: Targeted families >>> social stigma. High costs.

- **Peers affect development**: In mixed groups, children who are disadvantaged learn more

- **Voter support (in US)** greatest when HQ programs are available to all

- **Maternal employment lifts**: externalities even for richest countries
**EPPE/UK:** Sammons et al (2007)

*The higher the quality of preschool program the greater the positive effects over time* (on mathematics, reading, pro-social behaviour, and lower hyperactivity)
Preparing for School
(Thorpe et al, 2004)

Curriculum and pedagogy matters

Predictors of poor progress

- attending preschool as opposed to preparatory program
- having home based rather than centre based care
Realising ECEC benefits

The promise of long and wide benefits of ECEC programs is not only a matter of addressing structural input variables:

- qualifications
- staff to child ratios
- group-size
- defined curriculum framework
- duration of program (15hrs/week of preschool)
- agreed rating systems
ACCESS:  Legal entitlement to a public program begins at 5-6yrs
(quantity)

1-2yrs  26.3%
2-3yrs  40.0%
3-4yrs  61.5%
4-5yrs  80.9%

(Source: OECD 2006, Starting Strong II)

QUALITY....
Qualifications: <60% of ECEC contact staff hold any formal qualification
NCAC “quality accreditation” and a “ceiling effect”?
Low investment and poor equity

Source: OECD family data base, 2007
**Australian Context**

**Education:**
ECEC programs not universally provided at 3-4 years yet these predict performance at school entry and beyond

**Social cohesion:** there are marked inequalities evident in society with disadvantaged and culturally diverse and geographically isolated groups marginalised. Access to quality ECEC is inequitable.

**Economics:**
Australian investment low and market led

**Health:** there are marked inequalities with disadvantaged and culturally diverse and geographically isolated groups having poorer access to service. Poverty, health and the well-being of children closely tied.
Growing more useful Australian ECEC research to direct the system over time

Getting more than the ‘box-office’ evidence
The effectiveness and economy of Australian ECEC programs study (Tayler et al 2008)

Single Community Breakout

Jurisdiction 1

Community 1
n = 550

Centre based
n = 400

Community kindergarten
n = 200

For profit child care
n = 150

Not for profit child care
n = 50

Family day care
n = 100

Home based
n = 150

No program control
n = 50
1. **QUALITY**: The *level* of quality (a culturally defined construct) is critical to realising the (short & long) returns promised by ECEC programs.

   - The higher the quality the greater the likelihood of positive long-term outcomes.
   - The wider the access by children the greater the likelihood of positive long-term outcomes.

2. **COMMUNITY**: Decisions about children’s participation and the level of public investment depend on community understandings and aspirations for ECEC. Communities need clear evidence about the effects of ECEC provision.

3. **RESEARCH**: ECEC research needs a multi-disciplinary base to best report effects over time. Study designs that generate deeper evidence about the impact of programs on child outcomes could better direct public policy and investment.