

## Childcare provision: Whose responsibility? Who pays?

*Joy Goodfellow*

### Introduction

Recent debates about the provision of child care for children of below school age have focused on issues relating to children, to families, to social capital building and to financial return on investment. The first of these is concerned with providing for children's growth and development and focuses on the enhancement of skills and experiences conducive to furthering children's capacity as learners. Early learning provides a critical underpinning for subsequent social and academic success (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000). For example, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), identified that 4–5 years olds who had not participated in educational programs prior to school were performing less well on measures of early literacy and numeracy (Harrison & Ungerer 2005).

Issues around social capital building recognise that a focus on the early years, particularly for socially disadvantaged families, subsequently reaps long-term benefits in terms of improvement in educational outcomes, increased economic self-sufficiency, crime reduction and improvement in family relationships and health (Bruner 2004; Karoly et al. 1998, Lynch 2004; Schweinhart 2005). Family circumstances include those associated with social disadvantage, child protection and disability. Martin (2003) identified that the childcare system in Australia returned over \$1.86 per dollar spent to the government's 'bottom line' through increased taxation revenue and reduced social assistance outlays. Martin also recognised the potential for such investment to have a ripple effect through society and, consequently, to facilitate social capital building. The Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and the NSW Department of Community Services Early Intervention Program have both welfare and social reform agendas but little attention has truly been given to financial and social return on investment.

Child care exists within social justice and political contexts and targets availability as well as access to early childhood services for some disadvantaged families. Childcare provision is also linked to supporting women who wish to enter/re-enter the workforce and so alleviates a shortfall in the labour force. The workforce agenda spans productivity issues as well as equity and affordability with respect to ensuring that childcare services are universally available regardless of ethnicity, disability, income or regionality. Secondary to this are issues relating to women's rights.

An accelerated growth within the corporate childcare sector has increased the availability of long day care places but it comes at a cost. For example, *ABC Learning* in the 2004/2005 financial year profit exceeded \$50 million (ABC Learning, 2005a). This included a contribution of approximately \$206 million from Commonwealth Child Care Benefits (Horin, 2006).

In addressing the multitude of issues surrounding childcare provision, Press and Woodrow (2005) identified three constructions of early childhood education and care – understandings about care responsibilities, the benefits of early intervention and remediation and, early childhood as a social and economic investment. At the heart of these constructions, are two key questions – who should be responsible for providing child care and who should pay? The perspectives taken in response to these questions reflect humanistic, social welfare, economic and moral/ethical traditions.

A humanistic perspective encompasses concerns for children's development, social welfare, and the resultant social and financial cost in terms of child protection and family dysfunction. Economic perspectives focus more on returns on investment. Moral/ethical issues reflect matters of citizenship and the responsibility governments have towards individuals and to the public as a whole (Sumsion 2006; Stroick & Jensen 1999). A government agenda for child care needs to take a holistic and informed view of children's services, as well as consider how policy changes can affect the ways in which parents balance family/work options, participate in training and in the labour force. Further to this, efforts to address child care need to be recognised within the context of there being a 'new social risk' (Jenson & Saint-Martin 2006, p. 429) associated with changing family formation, the

availability and cost of carers, and the potential for there to be a changing value placed on caring itself.

In this chapter, I first provide a brief sketch of what we know about human development and social capital building within the context of childcare provision. I then construct child care as a marketplace in order to reflect the current debates about childcare provision and contemplate what this might mean from a parent or consumer perspective. Finally, I use these understandings to identify possibilities with respect to who should provide and who should pay for the out-of-home care of young children who are of below school age.

### **Knowledge that informs decision making about childcare provision**

Research, theory, policy development and commentary form the basis for discussion, review and decision making. The evidence concerning children and human development, social capital building, quality child care and access/affordability is substantive. The following provides a snapshot of such evidence.

#### **Children and human development**

- We know from brain research that the early childhood years are an important time in life where the foundations for later development and learning are established (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000)
- We know that early intervention programs can enhance children's learning particularly where those programs include children from families who may not otherwise be able to afford child care (Goodfellow et al. 2004).

#### **Families and social capital**

- We know that there are increasing numbers of women who are participating in the workforce and are seeking child care (ABS 2006, 2005, 2003)

- We know that the number of children living in one parent families has increased from 15 per cent in 1992 to 20 per cent in 2003 (AIHW 2005; ABS 2003)
- We know that affordability of child care is an issue and that childcare costs continue to increase (AIHW 2006; NATSEM 2006).

### **Quality child care**

- We know that, while regulation has its place, staff are the key to quality child care (Cleveland & Krashinsky 2005; Fenech, Sumsion & Goodfellow 2006; Ghazvini & Mullis 2002; Phillips et al. 2000)
- We know that the qualities and remuneration of childcare staff make a difference and that staff require specialist professional and practical knowledge (Moss 2004; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips 2000).

### **Access and affordability**

- We know that over 800 000 or 46 per cent of Australian children 0–5 years access some form of child care (excluding preschool) on a regular basis (ABS 2006)
- We know that the high cost of child care is largely related to staff salaries (as identified in annual reports of KU Children’s Services 2005; SDN 2005; ABC Learning 2005a)
- We know that there are issues concerning affordability, availability and choice particularly in rural communities (ABS 2005; AIHW 2006; Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council 2001).

### **The childcare marketplace**

Given the demand for child care, the benefits of high quality care and the changing face of childcare provision in Australia during recent years, it is timely to reconsider childcare directions in this

country. This issue has received considerable media attention since 2001 when ABC Learning Centres Limited became the first childcare corporation listed on the Australian Stock Exchange (Australian Stock Exchange 2006). Prior to the intended acquisition of Hutchison's Child Care Services announced on 7 July 2006 (*The Age* 2006) the company held around 20 per cent of the available 229 603 federally-supported long day care places (ABC 2005b; Rush & Downie 2006, p. 43). This recent acquisition adds 83 centres or 6521 places to ABC Learning Centre's ownership portfolio.

I find it helpful to use the metaphor of child care as a marketplace when attempting to conceptualise the forces that currently play on childcare provision in this country. This metaphor is analogous with the business world and a free market economy in which:

- 'producers' develop and sell childcare places
- 'products' are 'places' that accommodate children
- 'consumers' are parents who buy places
- advertising occurs through specialised glossy magazines and TV commercials (with jingles) that promote childcare 'goods' and services
- discounting occurs through offering 'loyalty' cards and advertising 'two weeks free child care'
- marketing strategies such as area letterbox drops are used
- entry/exit identity swipe cards are promoted as a security measure (Hudson 2006)
- childcare workers are perceived as technicians who adopt prescribed practices or generic curricula designed to produce predetermined and normative outcomes (Moss 2004, p. 21).

In other words, child care and children become commodified.

## **The commodification of care**

Commodification reflects a view that care is treated like any other commodity where cost, price, availability and distribution are left to the working of a free-market economy. That is, when perceived as a commodity, children become objectified and child care becomes a responsibility that is met through the 'childcare marketplace' (Moss 2006, p.72). As in health care, the belief that underpins this view is that a quality product should emerge as a result of providers competing with each other on quality, price and satisfaction (Pellegrino 1999). This is an interesting concept when applied to child care because it reflects concerns about the quantifiable aspects of child care such as affordability, availability, choice and distribution rather than focusing on the child's early learning experiences.

## **Market choices**

A market oriented view is one of seeing parents as consumers and children as products that are boxed into the service types that may or may not be currently available within the marketplace. While regulation and accreditation may act as quality controls, limitations occur because of lack of availability and affordability. This is the rhetoric of quality child care.

In Australia, childcare services may be provided through the corporate/for-profit, business, local government or community sector. Parents, as purchasers or consumers, may make assumptions about the quality of the service in the knowledge that the service is regulated and accredited. When they have a choice, parents make decisions as to the extent to which a service best meets their needs.

Most often, parents choose a service because of convenience but also on appearance and safety. Quality in terms of what parents value and recommendations through 'word-of-mouth' also play a role in parents' decision making (ABS 2006). From a humanistic perspective, the personal and emotional qualities associated with caring make child care a peculiar kind of market that sets it apart from other markets. However, while this aspect of child care takes account of how the child experiences care, it is difficult for parents, as purchasers of child care, to assess these qualities.

## Uniqueness of the childcare market

The childcare market has the following unique aspects:

- Consumers require services that are complex and have social, moral and emotional components
- Consumers are willing to pay for 'emotional engagement' (Vincent & Ball 2001, p.565) found in effective relationships within what Vincent & Ball describe as 'theatres of emotion' (p. 643). Parents have to trust the childcare provider because they are not in a position to experience what life is like for their child on a daily basis within the childcare setting
- There is a lack of 'consumer sovereignty' in that parents may have insufficient information about the service to enable them to make a fully informed choice. Indeed, they may well be a 'captive market' (Vincent & Ball 2001, p. 566)
- Child care is a highly gendered market where women are often emotionally challenged in their decision to even use child care (Ball & Vincent 2005).
- It is a segmented market because of the different types of services and their management structure/ownership.
- It is a 'fragmented' market where there is division of responsibility between different levels of government (COAG 2006, p. 29)
- It is an 'imperfect' market (Sumsion 2006, p.102) because it is not equitable in terms of supply and demand. Parents often do not have a choice
- The childcare system is 'redistributive' (Gormley 2000, p. 57). In Australia we have a federal system that holds power over the funding of childcare services (other than preschool) through the provision of subsidies such as a 30 per cent Child Care Rebate, a Maternity Payment (that increased from \$3166 to \$4000 in July 2006), Family Tax Benefits and Child Care Benefits (DFACSA 2006).

The Australian Government also provides childcare assistance to disadvantaged families through its Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and supports women in entering the workforce by providing priority of access to long day care centres (FACS 2004; DFACS 2005). The states are responsible for regulating and licensing such services.

The uniqueness of the childcare market and the difficulties parents have in making informed choice makes it difficult for parents (as consumers) to exert pressure on the market to either deliver or improve quality (Press & Woodrow 2005). However, as alluded to earlier, child care is more than the provision of places. There are societal and moral/ethical issues associated with out-of-home childcare provision that go beyond individuals and families. As Waterman (2003) claims, neither state nor the market can perform the nurturing function required in high quality caring.

### **Freeing up the market**

The Australian Government freed up the childcare market in 2000 when it moved from paying centre subsidies, to the provision of a Child Care Benefit payable to parents (AIHW 2006; DFACS 2005). This led to a significant increase in the number of childcare places and particularly those provided by the corporate sector. Along with opening up the market, a continuous quality control and improvement system was introduced through the establishment of the National Childcare Accreditation Council and accreditation was linked to the payment of Child Care Benefits (Taylor 2005).

### **Regulation as quality control**

Both national accreditation and state regulation attempt to ensure that services meet those standards of care required for the safety and wellbeing of children. Standards with respect to the 'care' of children are upheld through the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS). The agenda underpinning this system is somewhat different from the state-based enforcement of regulation that is concerned with minimum standards that support children's health and safety. Regulatory processes are also concerned with ensuring that children in care are meaningfully

engaged in positive interactions and experiences that are relevant to their interests and needs (NCAC 2005; Taylor 2005). However, it is interesting to consider the extent to which the childcare regulations are *provider focused*, *child focused* and/or *facility focused* because of the potential for gaps in quality control.

A *provider focus* is oriented towards having a highly skilled and stable childcare workforce. A *child focus* orients provision towards child protection and nurturance where relationships are valued and seen to be critical to supporting children's cognitive and social development. A *facility focus* is one where regulation is preoccupied with what we commonly know as the measurable and 'structural' variables of quality (for example, staff/child ratios; group size). The provider focus appears to be less well catered for within the current regulatory environment.

### **Who should provide?**

Staff are the key to determining those practices that have good outcomes for children and parents (Cleveland & Krashinsky 2005; Moss 2004, NICHD 2002). Integrated, universal and strengths-based child and family centres require staff that have a particular mix of skills and attributes as well as professional knowledge. Staff are responsible for making professional judgments, for addressing individual child needs and family circumstances and, for engaging in and managing relationships. Effective communication and interpersonal skills are critical (Cleveland & Krashinsky 2005; Friendly, Doherty & Beach 2005).

Bruner (2004) argues that relationships and practices not curricula are key to achieving success. Therefore, the early childhood workforce needs to have the capability to engage in such relationships. As community members, staff have a civic responsibility to be responsive to the community and develop educational and early learning contexts to support the development of the future citizens of this country. The balance of staff's responsibility and accountability to their employers has the potential to impact on cost and, therefore, consideration of who should pay.

When child care is viewed as a public good, government has a national responsibility to not only plan for a mix of appropriate

services but to ensure that they operate at the highest standard possible. Therefore, government needs to make a significant direct contribution to the funding of those services and target those aspects of service provision that create and sustain high quality. Some research has demonstrated that community based services are more inclined to provide higher quality child care than the private/corporate sector as private/corporate services have added responsibility to shareholders/owners (Cleveland & Krashinsky 2005; Doherty, Friendly & Forer 2002). Other research has shown that it is not who owns/manages the service that makes the difference but how the service is operated in accordance with dimensions of quality such as staff qualifications/experience, the stability of staff and the staff work environment and conditions (NICHD 2002). Where there is a high turnover of staff, staff that have minimum qualifications, or staff are readily transferred across services then relationships between staff, and between staff and child/parents, are negatively challenged.

## **Principles underlying childcare provision**

In the 2003 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (cited in Meagher 2004) just over 2000 people responded to a question about who is best suited to delivering human services. With respect to child care, one third of respondents identified government. The other two thirds were almost equally distributed between private business and families/relatives. This is an interesting perspective when one considers that 69.4 per cent of government supported long day care centres are provided by the private-for-profit sector with twice as many children attending private long day care services (34 per cent) to those attending community based long day care (16 per cent) (DFACS 2005).

The literature suggests that childcare provision:

- should address the needs of consumers and not be to the detriment of the child – that is, health, safety and educational issues and, therefore, regulation
- should be sufficiently flexible to cater for diverse needs across communities

- should have an overall responsibility in relation to citizenship (Michel 2006; Williams 2001)
- needs to be socially responsible where spill-overs to society are concerned and particularly in relation to social welfare support and disadvantaged families (Preston 1993)
- should be affordable so enabling adults to balance work and family as well as providing higher quality children's services in which children have opportunities to learn and develop (AIHW 2006)
- needs to take into account the fact that higher quality is dependant upon high quality staff. High quality staffing requires either higher parent fees or subsidisation by government.

If child care is to provide more than custodial care then ways need to be found to link service provision with higher quality staffing. One strategy is to support the engagement of high quality staff through the professional registration of teachers and direct payment, by government, to services that hire such teachers.

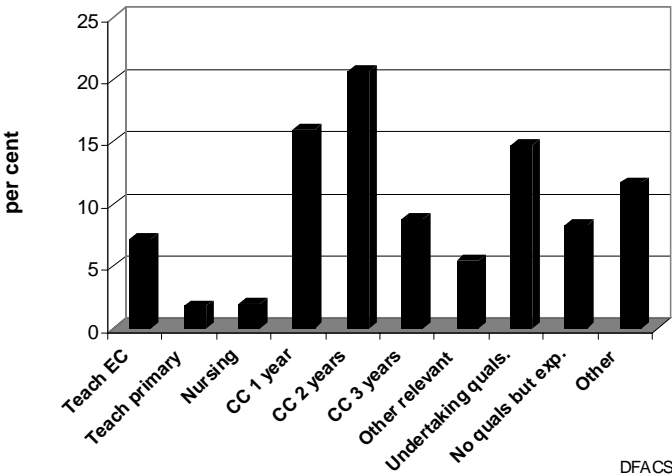
### **The case for highly qualified staff**

If we place a value on what happens to children in child care then subsidised care is required because of the high cost of qualified staff. The research literature has identified that staff qualities, staffing and staff working conditions contribute to quality services (see for example, Doherty, Friendly & Forer 2002). Factors such as staff qualifications and experience, capacity to develop warm and enduring relationships with children and the stability of staffing reflect the essential but hidden costs of child care. Neither accreditation as it now exists (and the processes associated with it) nor state regulation can adequately address the processes and relationships that need to occur between children, staff and parents without reliance on the capabilities of staff and the stability of staffing. These dimensions of staffing are currently the responsibility of the auspicing organisation and can result in considerable diversity (Sundell 2000).

Australia needs to adopt measures to ensure that quality staff is available and utilised. For this to occur, staff appointment and remuneration needs to be tied to government funding. Currently, the greatest proportion of staff in long day care centres in Australia are those that hold a two-year childcare qualification. The proportion of university qualified teachers employed in long day care services is low yet young children benefit greatly from highly qualified staff (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000).

The following figure suggests that there is a disparity between the engagement of highly qualified staff and those with lesser qualifications.

Figure 12.1 Qualifications of staff employed in long day care services – 2004 (N=51,105)



DFACS, 2005

Source: DFACS 2005

The data in Figure 12.1 was collected by the Department of Family and Community Services in their 2004 Child Care Census (DFACS 2005). The overall response rate to the census was 88 per cent and

the figures in the graph indicate percentages of the total number of staff. Some staff held more than one qualification. The Child Care Census indicated that there were 446 471 long day care services with 61 per cent of these services classed as private long day care services. The data also indicated that the community sector employed a higher proportion of staff with 'teaching' qualifications and two-year diploma staff than the private sector whereas the private sector employed a greater proportion of staff with a one-year childcare qualification and those undertaking qualifications. The private sector had a higher percentage of staff with three-year childcare qualifications than did the community sector.

The age profile of childcare workers was strongly skewed to the younger age group with almost one third aged in the 15 to 24 year age group (Australian National Training Authority 2005) suggesting that workers are more likely to be young and inexperienced.

### **Who should pay?**

Consumers pay either directly or indirectly for services. With respect to child care, parents/families pay fees. Currently, these may be subsidised by government through taxation rebates and the Child Care Benefit.

### **Government**

Inequalities in the provision and distribution of childcare services are not the concerns of a free market. One inequality is that access to early childhood services is lower where families are jobless or parents do not have a post-school qualification. Access may also be difficult in rural/remote regions, where children are from Indigenous families or where children come from families who have diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (AIHW 2005). Such inequities could more readily be addressed through national rather than individual state support. Since the early years provide a foundation for human development, then on the basis of equity and access issues, provision needs to be made at a national level in order to ensure that all children of below school age have access to high quality early education and care services. A free-choice market economy is unable to exist where there is little flexibility or choice

in circumstances where services are ‘thinly’ provided (Cleveland & Krashinsky 2005).

Improvements in early childhood development and learning outcomes require support through a national collaborative approach. The COAG (Council of Australian Governments) National Reform Initiative Working Group in its report to the February 2006 COAG meeting acknowledged the importance of ‘high-quality early educational programs’ and the contribution that provision of quality child care can make to the nation’s economic prosperity. This report identified that ‘Australia’s investment in early childhood development before school entry remains low by international standards’ (COAG 2006, p. 29).

In Australia, different tiers of government and private providers deliver different services for different purposes in an ad hoc way. This is in stark contrast to what has happened in New Zealand where there is an integrated approach to each of three key aspects of service provision – staffing, the curriculum and funding (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2002). In their *10-year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* the New Zealand Ministry of Education identified five key goals that are supportive of both children and parents through a comprehensive network of integrated service strategies. These goals target:

- funding and support for a regulated system
- support for community-based early childhood services
- professional registration of teachers
- cooperation and collaboration between early childhood, health and social services in conjunction with parents
- greater involvement of government particularly in areas of disadvantage (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2002, pp. 2–3).

The New Zealand government has taken significant responsibility for the delivery, maintenance and quality control of childcare services within that country.

## **Subsidised care**

Subsidised child care, particularly in the form of fee relief, already exists. An alternative is to subsidise staff salaries. The aim would be to ensure that staff are of the highest calibre. Staff also need to be adequately remunerated for their professional work thus encouraging greater stability in staffing and attractiveness for staff to work in areas of high demand.

## **Parents to pay**

While parents may pay a fee based on need (because of government priorities whether to do with employment or family circumstances such as disadvantage) they should also have a choice. They may choose to pay more for services that reflect their priorities, needs and family values.

## **Possibilities: A marketplace of values**

Parents seek flexibility in their choice of child care. Strategic measures need to be used to provide the evidence upon which parents make child care decisions in order to ensure accessibility and availability of services. While decisions about who should provide and who should pay may be evidence-based, they are also values driven. The discussion around choice and availability of child care is underpinned by what I loosely describe as a 'marketplace of values'.

Erwin (1996, p. 201) describes values as 'a set of beliefs that guide actions'. The values that underpin child care provision include universal, affordable, regulated, accessible, integrated/coordinated, the necessity to be of high quality and accessibility to diverse populations. There is also the question of who holds such values (child care producers, consumers and/or government) and for whom?

While it is difficult to provide a linear approach to child care provision, government (in collaboration with those who are best informed about child care practices) needs to take a collective social and civic responsibility for the provision of early child and family services. In doing so, it may be possible to redistribute responsibility across policy development and implementation,

funding, service provision and the monitoring/evaluation of the impact of those services (both individually and nationally) as well as socially and economically. Given the issues that I have raised in this chapter, the matrix of responsibilities and enabling conditions displayed in Figure 12.2 (see page 262) outlines a beginning framework for such planning.

The matrix (adapted from Stroick & Jenson, 1999) provides an opportunity to address goals that reflect evidence-based understandings about children, social capital building and service standards alongside enabling conditions that support strategies designed to facilitate goal direction. The matrix also identifies government as having a strong social and moral responsibility to ensure universal, equitable and affordable early childhood services.

The matrix is organised according to two key areas that underpin child care provision – societal investment (as applied to citizenship, social responsibility and universality), and service standards. Citizenship and social responsibilities encompass:

- parental support and respite – facilitating the development of parenting skills, access to employment and alleviation of disadvantage;
- social capital building – providing equity of access and community strengthening through leadership of early childhood staff within early childhood service hubs;
- investment in the child and family – through the provision of high quality services that address children’s wellbeing and learning;
- economic investment – that recognises the long-term impact of investment in the early years as being critical to human development and social capital building.

A number of enabling conditions support these responsibilities and standards. These conditions identify, contribute to and support the responsibilities and service standards. They are:

- work related parental benefits
- individual family/parenting benefits

- integrated, coordinated and regulated family friendly child care services
- staff accreditation
- provision for the maintenance of minimum standards
- equity of access and provision for early identification and intervention.

Further to this, the matrix recognises that the enabling conditions may be either an individual or a shared responsibility across governments and may have different outcomes for the child, for families and for governments.

The provision of services, while a government responsibility within a national framework, must be reflective of each local community. Professionally determined standards that include registered teachers and provision for their ongoing professional development, provide a basis upon which key accountabilities to children, families and funding authorities (i.e. government), are addressed.

## **Considerations**

In this chapter, I have considered the contexts that can contribute to decisions about who should provide and who should pay for child care in Australia. The considerations include children's wellbeing, changing composition of families, the participation of women in the workforce and understanding about social and economic returns on investment in child care.

Changing views of children and their capabilities and capacities to learn have more recently permeated our understandings of young children as learners. We need to move from what Moss (2006, p.73) describes as a 'child care' to a 'pedagogical' discourse in the provision of early childhood services. A pedagogical discourse is exemplified in the Reggio Schools (Malaguzzi, cited in Moss 2006, p.73) where the image of the child is respectful of children as individuals who are strong, competent and active and who engage in a community of relationships.

If the focus is on 'pedagogy' rather than 'care' then the view is one of children who have a right to access spaces or environments

Figure 12.2: Matrix of key accountabilities and enabling conditions for universal child care service provision

	Social and economic investment responsibilities			Service standards		
	Parental support and respite	Social capital building	Investment in the child and family	Economic investment	Service provision inc. curriculum and staffing	Ongoing monitoring / evaluation
Enabling conditions (supported directly or indirectly by government)						
Work related parental benefits inc. sick leave, job protection and leave for 'caring' ***	✓	✓	✓			
Parenting benefits inc. family tax benefit **	✓		✓			
Integrated, coordinated and regulated child/family learning and resource/support centres *	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Staff standards and accreditation *			✓	✓	✓	✓
Standards relating to early education, health and safety *			✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to high quality programs for child well-being and development inc. school readiness and early detection *** ** *	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Key:** \* Australian government subsidised - direct (to services to support staffing)      \*\* Australian government subsidised - indirect (establishment of standards; provision of family benefits)      \*\*\* Individual families (payment of fees)

where they have opportunities to develop those life enhancing capabilities that form the foundation for future learning. Care is not ignored but considered to be integral to service provision. Being integral means that it is the responsibility of early childhood professionals to engage in those relationships that are indicative of caring. Often this is only possible where there are experienced staff who are able to form relationships over time with children and families.

From a child oriented perspective, care and education become synonymous. From a social perspective, where care is considered as work, employment conditions such as maternity/paternity leave would acknowledge parents' responsibility for their children. Parents would then not be disadvantaged in their workplace by taking family leave. Such a view of care would also value the work undertaken by childcare professionals.

I have argued elsewhere (Goodfellow 2005) that citizenship and social responsibility lie heavily with government. However, this should not be to the detriment of social capital building, parental responsibility and parental decision making. These considerations open up the possibility of both a division of responsibility and a possible policy mix to support the provision of child care. This may be managed through cooperative efforts across federal, state and local governments in collaboration with key stakeholders including parents. Common social and economic elements also need to be comprehensively addressed. These include the delivery of children's services that pay attention to:

- parent and family circumstances including poverty and support for parents
- children's development and wellbeing
- social capital building with a focus on human capital
- adequacy of service provision including staffing and curriculum
- monitoring and evaluation of services including establishment of standards and regulation.

If we support the notion of caring as being both 'work' and a social right of citizenship as well as the nurturing of young children's

development then responsibility for overseeing actions that support this position needs to be taken seriously by those who have authority to do so. The matrix of social responsibility identifies elements for discussion and debate as we consider new social risks, new understandings about the importance of the early years in human development and an ‘investing-in-children paradigm’ (Jenson, 2004, p.171). Responsibility for children’s wellbeing is no longer solely a family responsibility but is shared within a broader community context. Should reduction of efforts devoted to family and community capacity building become evident then Folbre (2005) warns of the dire consequences for ‘the state’ of what she describes as ‘social chilling’.

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