

# Argument and Critical thinking: session 1

## Activity 1: Facts, opinions, evidence

Read the following statements and identify them as fact (F), fact requiring evidence (FRE), opinion (O), opinion requiring evidence (ORE), or evidence (E) which could be used to support a fact or opinion. Some of the statements will fit into more than one category, depending on the argument and the audience.

1. It is not acceptable to have a child when you are single.	
2. Forced human trafficking is wrong.	
3. China has a long history and a big population.	
4. Australia now has a National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care.	
5. About 90% of egg producers use battery cages.	
6. Men are better drivers than women.	
7. On average, women in Australia live longer than men.	
8. Sex slavery is caused by poverty.	
9. According to a directive from the Victorian Government's Essential Services Commission, Melbourne homes and businesses will have to pay 14.8% more for water from July 1, 2008.	
10. Smoking is an anti-social habit.	

## Activity 2: Argument and non-argument

In the following paragraphs, identify whether the author is presenting:

A a description

B a disagreement

C an argument, and, if so, say why.

Early childhood settings are subject to a 'national quality assessment and rating process' (DEEWR, 2011) as they endeavour to implement the National Quality Framework. This five-tiered rating system intends to encourage ongoing improvement while providing information to the public on each service that undergoes the rating process, thus supporting parents in making an informed choice regarding service selection.

A      B      C

Complementary therapies are an increasingly popular supplement to other forms of treatment. Those who use these therapies argue that treatments such as reflexology, homeopathy and shiatsu complement the care provided by the medical profession. Indeed, some people claim that these therapies are often more effective than traditional medicines (see, for example Jones and Ellman 2007; Dell 2006). There are many anecdotal cases of miraculous cures, and there are those who believe such methods can compete on equal terms with medical approaches. This just isn't convincing.

A      B      C

Smacking is physically and emotionally harmful to children. Hitting another person is assault (UNCRC 2003) and it would not be tolerated against an adult. Psychologists point out that many adults have no sense of the cruelty of smacking, precisely because they were smacked themselves as children and mistakenly regard this as normal (Klinger 2008). They then go on to assault other vulnerable people, and the cycle continues.

A      B      C

It may be safer for new-born babies to sleep with the parents. New-born babies may lack the capacity to monitor their own breathing and body temperature during the first three months of life. Babies who sleep alongside their mothers could benefit from learning to regulate their breathing and sleeping, following the rhythm of the parent (Langer & Ali 2010). These babies wake more frequently than mothers who sleep alone. Moreover, mothers who sleep next to their babies are better able to monitor their child for movement during the night (Yang 2009).\*

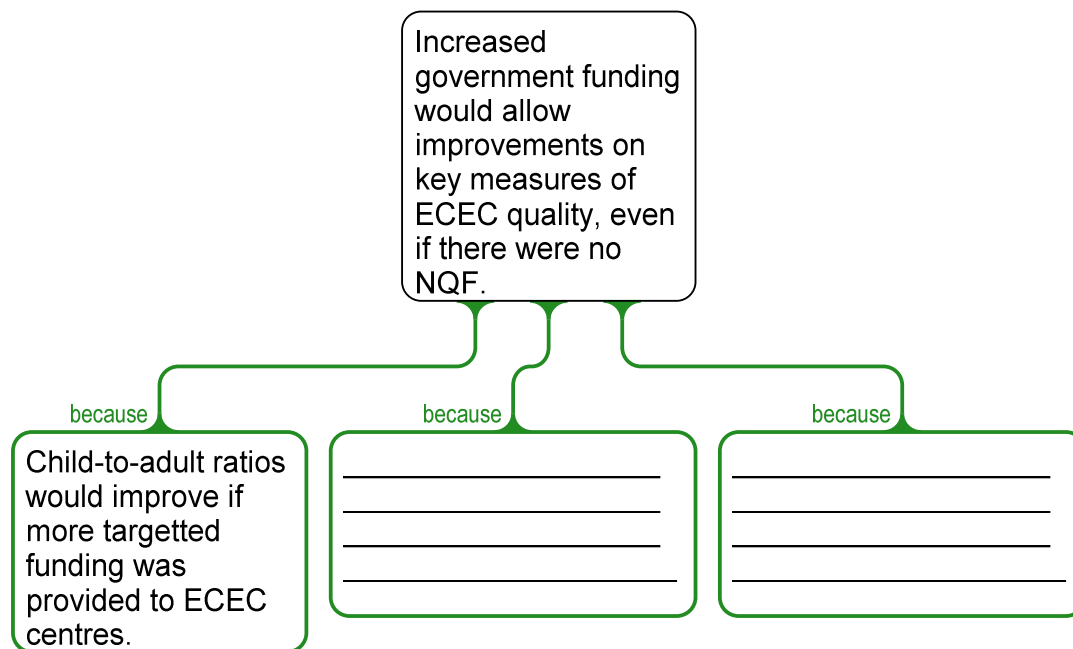
\* all the above examples adapted from Cottrell 2005

### Activity 3: Complete the argument map

Read the text, then complete the argument map that follows.

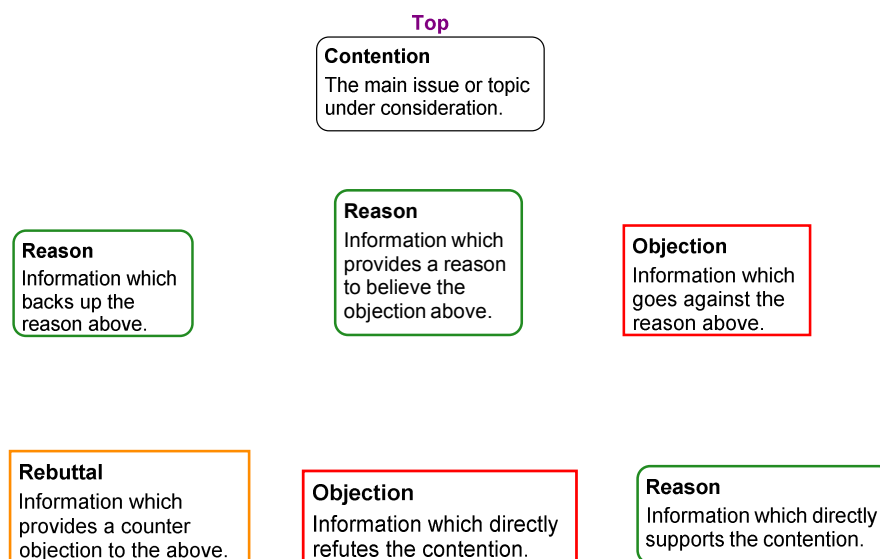
Increased government funding would allow measurable improvements to ECEC in Australia, with or without the NQF. Take, for example, three key indicators of service quality: child-to-adult ratios, qualification levels of staff, and rate of staff turnover. In many Australian centres, child-to-adult ratios are still well above the recommended level of one educator for every four children in long day care services (COAG 2009). Child-to-adult ratios would improve if more targeted government funding were provided to ECEC centres. In terms of staff qualifications, the evidence shows that quality improves where centres employ more university qualified staff (NECDSC 2009), but better qualified staff cost more. Better qualified staff would be more affordable if the government increased funding targeted for this purpose. Similarly, high staff turnover associated with low rates of pay and poor

conditions harms service quality (Rintoul et al 1998). Further government funding to improve the pay of all ECEC workers, as recommended by the Productivity Commission (2011), would reduce staff turnover in the sector.



#### Activity 4: Re-assemble the argument map

Re-construct this generic argument map. You can do this using pen and paper, or using software. If using Rationale, follow the instructions below:



If using Rationale:

1. **Create schema:** Locate the Essay Planning pane on the Building Panel. If necessary open it by clicking on it.

2. **Build argument:** Following the instructions in the Essay tab in the Text Panel, construct the argument map for an argumentative essay on a topic of your choice.
3. **Add Basis Boxes:** Open the Basis boxes tab in the Building Panel. Add Bases to the lowermost arguments on your map.
4. **Create Word document:** When the map is complete, click on the Export button in the upper right of the Essay tab in the Text Panel. When the document opens in Word, continue to modify your essay.

### Activity 5: Assumptions

Map the following argument, including the assumption you would have to make if you used this argument.

The issue is violent video games and the rise of school bullying. The following are the elements of an argument relating to this issue.

Contention: Children who play violent video games are more likely to become school bullies.

Reason: The majority of bullies play violent video games.

Evidence: In research involving 20 cases of bullying, 67% of children accused of bullying engaged in violent video games (Trott and Daniels 2011).

Assumption:

---

---

### Activity 6: Identifying an author's unstated assumptions

What is/are the assumption/s underlying the following passage.

Children are costing parents more. They demand parents' time, expecting to be taken to activities after school, whereas in the past parents' own interests took priority. Parents are under more pressure to provide toys and trips and costly brands of breakfast cereal, as well as clothes and shoes with expensive designer labels, so children can keep up with their peers. Advertising aimed at children should be banned in order to reduce this excessive peer pressure.

(Example from Cottrell 2005)

Assumption/s: \_\_\_\_\_

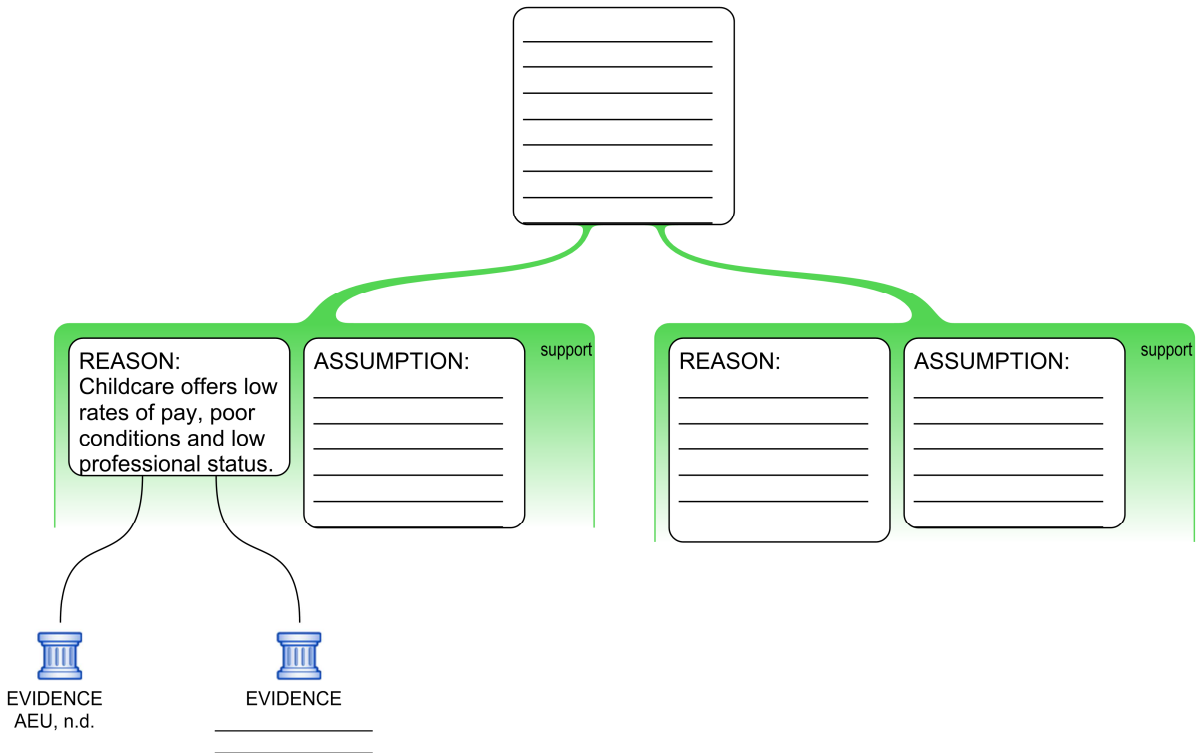
---

---

## Activity 7: Mapping unstated assumptions

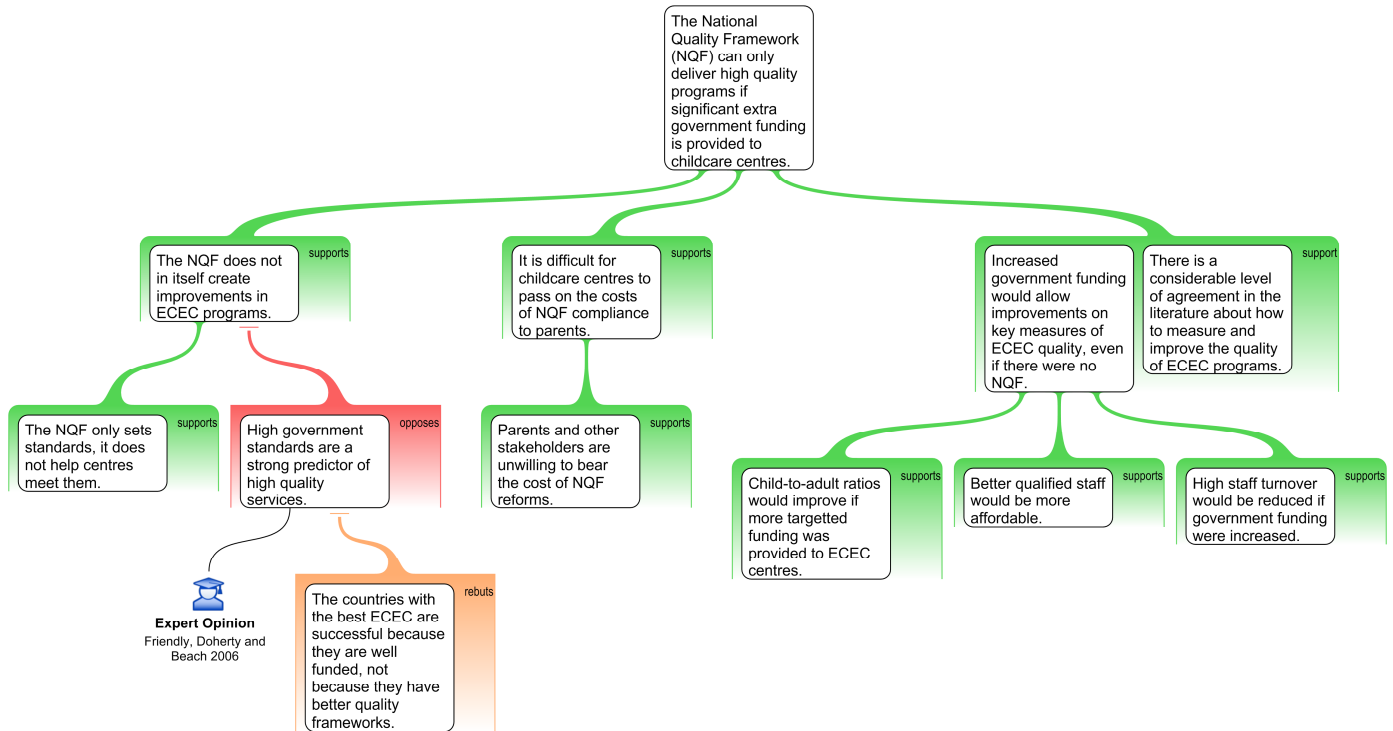
Read the following paragraph and complete the map below (including unstated assumptions). If using Rationale, click on Advanced mode, which allows you to map assumptions.

Governments should increase funding to early childhood centres to help them retain staff. Childcare offers low rates of pay, poor conditions and low professional status (AEU, n.d.; NECDSC, 2009) and it experiences one of the highest rates of staff turnover of any profession. Increased government funding would address the problem of high staff turnover.



## Activity 8: Read the argument map and complete the text

Insert the topic sentences from the argument map into the correct places in the essay that follows. (The essay is a short version of an essay that got a good mark in this course.) You might have to alter some claims slightly to make it fit the grammar of the essay. Some of the sentences from the map have already been inserted and labelled in the margin—you can cross them off the map.



**Essay question:** *Does simply enacting the National Quality Framework guarantee that children will now receive quality education and care or is further action necessary for the successful implementation of these reforms?*

### Response (adapted from a past student's essay):

The National Quality Framework (NQF) is a collection of documents designed to both ensure the delivery of quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services across Australia and to help inform parents about ECEC service quality. The NQF reforms were applauded by many who have long advocated for improving the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Australia. However, merely enacting the NQF does not guarantee high quality education and care for children. The NQF sets standards and requires centres to measure themselves and make their findings public, but, without increased funding, the NQF cannot help centres meet these higher standards. Attempts to pass the increased costs on to parents are inequitable and have met with public and political resistance. Moreover, it is evident that countries with the best ECEC systems are superior on key measures such as child-to-adult ratios, level of staff qualification and rate of staff turnover because they receive more government funding, not because they have superior quality frameworks. It is evident, then, that \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Recent research generally agrees that ECEC must provide 'high quality programs that are able to provide interesting and engaging environments' (WHO, 2009), based on 'the child's 'strengths,

capabilities, culture, interests and experiences’ (COAG, 2009, p12). In particular, advances in the field of developmental neurobiology highlight the importance of the first years in a child’s life. The child’s brain is undergoing rapid growth and development, more so than at any other time of life (Bukatko & Daehler, 2012), and, consequently, there is the greatest potential for this process to go wrong. This is due to a child’s development being ‘highly influenced by [its] environment’ (WHO, 2009, p58), where the environment can encompass the physical space, the resources that are available and of course, the people who are present. While each element can and should be modified in light of what research suggests is developmentally beneficial, it is the interactions and relationships between adults and children that have been identified as the key contributing factors in a child’s development (Rintoul et al, 1998).

Associations between the type of interaction that occurs and the outcomes for the child have been well documented, with the spectrum ranging from the essential ‘warm, attentive, affectionate... interaction with secure attachment’ (Rintoul et al, 1998, p19) to the horrendously detrimental actions that define child abuse and child neglect. Numerous studies have found that ‘maltreatment increases the risks for maladaptive outcomes and the development of psychopathology’ (Manly, Kim, Rogosch, & Cicchetti, 2001, p759). These *preventable* negative outcomes can damage children for the rest of their lives, affecting not only their health but their ‘education and economic’ prospects as well (WHO, 2009).

Given the risks to the child arising from low quality ECEC, it is important to measure the quality of services. Measures tend to fall into two categories: structural quality and process quality. Structural quality deals with the size of a group of children, staff turnover, ‘staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications’ (NECDSC, 2009, p22). Process quality is concerned with interactions between adults and children and children and children, the resources that are available, and how engaged the children are in the program (Huntsman, 2008). Process quality is often associated with aspects of structural quality. For example, child-to-staff ratios have been found to directly influence teacher behaviours, with higher child-to-adult ratios resulting in unfavourable behaviours and favourable ‘sensitive, frequent, and positive caregiving’ behaviours stemming from lower ratio conditions (Shim, Hestenes & Cassidy, 2004).

While the NQF requires ECEC educators to provide ‘high-quality programs’ \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_. The NQF sets standards but it does not help centres meet them, and its implementation has not been accompanied by sufficient extra government funding for the sector; rather, its success depends on centres funding most of the improvements it calls for.

reason

It is, however, difficult for ECEC centres to pass on the costs associated with the NQF to parents. The Australian Childcare Alliance has been campaigning against ‘out-of-pocket expenses faced by parents who are unwilling to bear the cost of NQF reforms’ (Dunlevy, 2012). This backlash tends to confirm the finding of Helburn and Howes (1996) that cost is a more important factor for parents than quality in selecting a service. More alarmingly, the opposition from parents as well as many for-profit service providers (Cheeseman & Torr, 2009), has led Opposition Leader Tony Abbott to make a promise to ‘reject the national quality rating system and review the early childhood national reform agenda’ (Cahir, 2010). In any case, it is inequitable to ask parents on lower incomes to pay more than they do now. Hence the need for increased funding from the federal government.

reason

reason

It has been argued that \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Friendly, Doherty & Beach, 2006);  
 however, one only has to look at Scandinavian countries to see that \_\_\_\_\_

evidence



\_\_\_\_\_. The frameworks used by Denmark, Finland and Sweden, for example, are often general and vague compared to Australia's, yet those countries, with their state-funded systems, lead the world in child-to-adult ratios and other key measures of quality (European Commission 2009). A report from the OECD (2006, p118) noted that 'governments need to fund, supervise and regulate private providers, if they wish to maintain quality for all young children'. To date, the Australian government has not paid enough attention to the first part of the OECD's formula. This is especially problematic when considering the disproportionate number of privately owned and run early childhood services in Australia (DEEWR, 2011).

\_\_\_\_\_. Before the NQF, there was already a considerable level of agreement in the literature about how to measure the quality of ECEC programs. Take, for example, three of those key indicators of service quality identified by the OECD (2006): child-to-adult ratios, qualification levels of staff, and rate of staff turnover. In many Australian centres, child-to-adult ratios are still well above the recommended level of one educator for every four children in long day care services (COAG, 2009). This is probably due to the get-out clause in the NQF which states child-to-adult ratios 'cannot exceed three times the ratio that pertains to the relevant age group' (COAG, 2009, p17) for centre-based care. \_\_\_\_\_

assumption

\_\_\_\_\_. The NQF requires centres to employ university qualified staff, but better qualified staff cost more. Again, \_\_\_\_\_ if the government increased funding for this purpose.

Similarly, \_\_\_\_\_. High staff turnover is an indicator of a low quality service because it reduces the possibility for 'warm, attentive, affectionate... interaction with secure attachment' (Rintoul et al, 1998, p19). Childcare in Australia still experiences one of the highest rates of staff turnover of any profession, due to low rates of pay, poor conditions and low professional status (AEU, n.d.; NECDSC, 2009). While the 2011 Productivity Commission report recommended improved wages and conditions for early childhood workers, more funding needs to be provided by the government to enact its recommendations.

In a time when more and more children are participating in some form of out of home care, whether this is due to parental work force participation, parents needing a break or desire for children to develop their social skills and school readiness, ECEC becomes ever more essential to Australian society. In stipulating the standard of how and what should be occurring in early childhood settings, the NQF's objective is to improve the quality of these services nationwide. Sufficient research has been done on quality and what it looks like to show us that quality improvement should be seen as a priority, but the example of the Scandinavian countries indicates that this a 'high quality service' does not depend so much on a comprehensive national framework as it does on adequate government funding. Unless further government funding is provided, it is conceivable that Australia could end up with the best quality framework in the world, and the lowest level of early childhood education and care among developed nations.