

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN
NEW SOUTH WALES:
HISTORICISING THE PRESENT**

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis represents a major part of the prescribed program of study.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father

Alexander Moyes Pettigrew

1913 — 1981

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ABSTRACT

This study critically analyses contemporary early childhood education and care (ECEC) in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, by historicising the present. In doing so, it contributes to a growing body of work that problematises current constructs of ECEC. Taking a social constructionist perspective that meanings are socially constructed within discourses, I use critical discourse analysis to identify and problematise multiple constructions of ECEC evident in a range of written public, government and professional texts; first in the contemporary NSW context and then in the period 1893 – 1915, the ‘moment’ when ECEC first emerged as separate education in Australia.

In both periods, ECEC was constructed in similar ways; as: separate education; scientific education and care; progressive education; socially just education; national work and women’s work. I show how both in the historical and contemporary contexts these constructs emerged within: economic; liberal / progressive; scientific; nationalist and gender discourses. I highlight how power operated through these constructs in a variety of ways to uphold dominant ways of being. I argue that the remarkable similarities between the construction of ECEC in the two periods suggests that these discourses create a discursive framework which creates the opportunity for multiple constructs of ECEC to be produced, but which also limits and confines what ECEC ‘is’ or can ‘be’.

These findings assist those of us who advocate for ECEC to recognise and understand how alternative, and even contradictory constructs of ECEC may exist concurrently. Such understandings may facilitate dialogue between parties who may differ in their views about the purposes of ECEC. The findings also place a burden on us to continually critically reflect upon and clearly articulate how and why we view ECEC in the ways we do. Further, they provide incentives for us to look beyond the ways ECEC is constructed and to challenge the discourses that make up the discursive framework in which ECEC is situated.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Date

July 2006

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ABSTRACT

This study critically analyses contemporary early childhood education and care (ECEC) in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, by historicising the present. In doing so, it contributes to a growing body of work that problematises current constructs of ECEC. Taking a social constructionist perspective that meanings are socially constructed within discourses, I use critical discourse analysis to identify and problematise multiple constructions of ECEC evident in a range of written public, government and professional texts; first in the contemporary NSW context and then in the period 1893 – 1915, the ‘moment’ when ECEC first emerged as separate education in Australia.

In both periods, ECEC was constructed in similar ways; as: separate education; scientific education and care; progressive education; socially just education; national work and women’s work. I show how both in the historical and contemporary contexts these constructs emerged within: economic; liberal / progressive; scientific; nationalist and gender discourses. I highlight how power operated through these constructs in a variety of ways to uphold dominant ways of being. I argue that the remarkable similarities between the construction of ECEC in the two periods suggests that these discourses create a discursive framework which creates the opportunity for multiple constructs of ECEC to be produced, but which also limits and confines what ECEC ‘is’ or can ‘be’.

These findings assist those of us who advocate for ECEC to recognise and understand how alternative, and even contradictory constructs of ECEC may exist concurrently. Such understandings may facilitate dialogue between parties who may differ in their views about the purposes of ECEC. The findings also place a burden on us to continually critically reflect upon and clearly articulate how and why we view ECEC in the ways we do. Further, they provide incentives for us to look beyond the ways ECEC is constructed and to challenge the discourses that make up the discursive framework in which ECEC is situated.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed _____ Date _____

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