

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

INTRODUCTION

One reason for asking for State assistance was that they [Free Kindergartens] were preparing the children for the public schools, and were preventing them from growing up into criminals, as many of them would otherwise do if left in the streets in their early years.¹

Early childhood programmes can have lasting positive effects by increasing children's chances of continuing education through high school and beyond and being employed as adults and reducing the likelihood of later substance misuse, mental illness and suicide, domestic violence and crime.²

More than a century separates these quotes, yet both construct early childhood education and care (ECEC) as preparation for later schooling and as a means of preventing future criminality. Why is it that a contemporary construct of ECEC resonates so soundly with one constituted over a hundred years ago? Is it perhaps that ECEC continues to be shaped by the same contextual concerns as it was in the past? I argue in this thesis that an historical perspective is crucial for understanding contemporary constructs of ECEC. Historical analysis helps us to recognise that what we consider contemporary constructs of ECEC have existed previously, and therefore, gives us the opportunity to learn from the past. But more than this, historical analysis assists us to understand how and why contemporary ECEC is constructed in the ways it is today.

¹ The Kindergarten Union: Deputation to Mr Garrad, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 February, 1897, p.3.

² B. Nelson, 'Importance of the early years', *Every Child*. 9 (1) (2003), p.3.

Aim of the Study

My concern in this thesis is to shed light on contemporary ECEC in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, by historicising the present. I investigate the social construction of ECEC in NSW from 1893 – 1915, the ‘moment’ when ECEC first emerged in Australia. My aim is to determine the conditions that gave rise to this ‘new’ phenomenon with the purpose of using these historical understandings to reflect on contemporary ECEC in NSW.

In this Introduction, I establish the contemporary context of ECEC in NSW. I then identify the questions guiding the study, before briefly outlining my theoretical orientation and methodology, and providing a rationale for examining the period 1893-1915. Next, I discuss how my work contributes to the scholarly literature examining ECEC. I then go on to provide an overview of each chapter and explain my referencing style. I conclude by describing how my engagement in this study marks a difficult and traumatic personal journey that has had some quite profound influences on my sense of self.

The Contemporary Context of ECEC in NSW

Internationally, ECEC is widely considered to be education and care for children aged from birth to eight years.³ Based on this definition, ECEC in NSW includes both prior-to-school services, which cater for children aged from six weeks up to six years, as well as the early years of school, which children may attend from age four and a half years.⁴ This definition of ECEC is problematic, however, as I discuss in Chapter Four, and in

³ F. Press, & A. Hayes, *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: Australian Background Report* (Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, 2000).

⁴ *ibid.*

this study I focus only on formal prior-to-school ECEC which I refer to hereafter as ECEC.

Provision of ECEC in NSW reflects a complex mix of diverse settings, provided by a variety of different types of organisations, supported, funded and regulated by three separate levels of government.⁵ ECEC services, include long-day care, family day care, pre-schools and occasional care. The various services are provided by a range of public, non-government not-for-profit, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit organizations, as well, as more recently, public companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange.⁶

Broadly, services that meet the needs of working parents, by catering for children aged six weeks to school age and operate for extended hours, such as long day care and family day care, are supported by the Australian Government.⁷ Services that have a primarily educational focus, operate during school hours, and cater for older children, aged three years to school age, such as pre-schools, are supported by the State Government.⁸ In reality, the boundaries between these services are artificial. For instance, in addition to providing work-related childcare, long day care and family day care are also educational; and pre-schools offer not just education but also serve a work-

⁵ F. Press, & C. Woodrow, 'Commodification, corporatisation and children's spaces', *Australian Journal of Education*. 49 (3), 278 – 291.

⁶ D. Brennan, 'Child care and Australian social policy', in J. Bowes (ed.), *Children, Families and Communities: Contexts and Consequences* (2nd ed.) (Sydney: Oxford University Press, 2004), 210 – 227; Press & Hayes, *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

related childcare function. Nevertheless, the manner in which ECEC is structured and funded in NSW entrenches a dichotomy between 'education' and 'care'.⁹

ECEC in NSW, as in the rest of Australia, is only partially funded by governments. Most long day care in NSW is provided by the private sector, and in recent years, there has been a huge expansion in the number of private for-profit long day care ECEC services.¹⁰ Long day care services charge attendance fees, which vary between services. Parents receive a subsidy for these childcare costs from the Australian Government, but only if the service their child attends participates in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System, a national system designed to monitor and improve the quality of childcare.¹¹ Most other ECEC services in NSW are provided by State or Local Governments, or non-government not-for-profit organisations.¹² They vary in the level of funding they receive and most charge fees to cover the gap between funding and operating costs. All ECEC services must comply with the NSW regulations which are monitored by the NSW Department of Community Services.¹³

Children may attend several different services.¹⁴ For instance, they might attend long day care for part of the week, and attend family day care before and after pre-school for the rest of the week. As such, children and parents may need to negotiate a variety of

⁹ D. Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Child Care: Philanthropy to Feminism and Beyond* (rev. ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Department of Family and Community Services [FaCS], *2004 Census of Childcare* (Australian Capital Territory, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). Accessed on 25 July, 2005 from: http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/childcare/04_census.htm.

¹¹ Press & Hayes, *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*.

¹² FaCS, *2004 Census of Childcare*.

¹³ Department of Family and Community Services, *Children's Services Regulation, 2004*. Accessed on 25 September 2005, from:

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/comm_partners/childrens_regs.htm.

¹⁴ J. Bowes, S. Wise, L. Harrison, A. Sanson, J. Ungerer, J. Watson, & T. Simpson, 'Continuity of care in the early years?: Multiple and changeable child care arrangements', *Family Matters*. 64 (2003), 30-35.

services with different operating structures, funding arrangements and legislative requirements. ECEC in NSW is, then, a fragmented field with a range of services that serve multiple purposes. In this study I do not differentiate between these services; rather I am concerned with how the concept of ECEC is broadly constructed.

Questions Underpinning The Study

Four major questions underpin my study. First, in what ways is ECEC constructed in NSW today? Second, how is power enacted through these constructs? Third, how has ECEC come to be constructed in these ways? And last, might alternative constructs of ECEC be possible? Despite their apparent simplicity, these questions raise complex epistemological and philosophical issues regarding the nature of 'meaning' and 'truth'. For instance, how do phenomena, such as ECEC, come into existence; how do meanings emerge; and how are particular meanings upheld? Below, I briefly explain my perspective on meaning making and my approach to addressing these questions. A more detailed discussion follows in Chapters One and Two.

Theoretical Orientations and Methodology

I take a social constructionist perspective based on postmodernist understandings of meaning and truth.¹⁵ From a social constructionist perspective, ECEC is considered to have multiple meanings that emerge from historically contingent discourses. In this thesis, discourses are defined as coherent systems of meaning, or bodies of knowledge, which actively construct the world and uphold particular ways of being.¹⁶ I use social constructionist discourse analysis to identify the multiple constructs of ECEC evident in

¹⁵ K. J. Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction* (London: Sage, 1999).

¹⁶ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); I. Parker, *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

NSW today and the discourses that give rise to those constructs, as well as to interrogate the ways power operates through those constructs. Because discursive power operates to make constructs appear natural to us, we are often blinded from seeing their socially constructed nature and tend to take them for granted. Thus, in order to ‘see’ these constructs we need a means of distancing ourselves.¹⁷ In this thesis, I distance myself by historicising the present.

Historical research, by examining how “the conditions making up the present were gestated”, helps us to better understand the contemporary.¹⁸ In particular, by “challenging received notions of the past”, historical research has a crucial role to play in ‘denaturalising’ the present.¹⁹ By revealing how ECEC in NSW was historically constituted, my study sheds light on why ECEC is constructed in the ways it is today, and challenges some of the supposed ‘truths’ of contemporary constructs of ECEC.

Rationale for Examining the Period 1893 - 1915

My decision regarding which point in the history of ECEC in NSW to examine has been influenced by Kendall’s assertion that the historian of the present should travel back in time and find “a moment of discontinuity — a moment when something new emerges”.²⁰ The ‘moment’ I have chosen, the twenty-two year period from two years prior to the establishment of the first Free Kindergarten in NSW in 1895 until 1915, is a period when both Free Kindergartens and Sydney Day Nursery emerged. The

¹⁷ M. Jørgensen, & L. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (London: Sage, 2002).

¹⁸ J. R. Benjamin, *A Student’s Guide to History* (8th ed) (Boston: Bedford / St Martin’s, 2001) p.2; J. Varela, ‘Genealogy of education’, in T. S. Popkewitz, M. A. Pereyra, & B. M. Franklin (eds.), *Cultural History and Education: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 110 – 150.

¹⁹ I. Grosvenor, & R. Watts, ‘Deviancy, identity and equality: Engaging with the past and present’, *Educational Review*. 54 (2) (2002), 101 – 103, p.103.

²⁰ G. Kendall, ‘Normality and meaningfulness: Detailing the child in eighteenth-century England’, *History of Education Review*. 30 (2) (2001), 26 – 36, p.26.

establishment of Free Kindergartens marked the beginning of the provision of a system of education, especially designed for children under six years of age, outside the state and secular school system in NSW. Sydney Day Nursery was one of the first day nurseries catering for the child care needs of working parents in NSW.

Importantly, the institutions that established Free Kindergartens and Sydney Day Nursery (namely The Kindergarten Union of NSW and Sydney Day Nursery Association) continue to operate and remain highly influential peak organisations. They provide models of practice of ECEC in NSW, and continue to contribute to the ways contemporary ECEC is constructed.

The Contribution of the Study

My study contributes to a body of work that for the last decade or so has sought to critically examine ECEC. This work comes predominantly from writers operating within the paradigms of postmodernism and feminist poststructuralism and could be referred to as deconstructionist.²¹ ‘Deconstruction’ is a term used to refer to a range of critical approaches which aim to ‘pull apart’ constructs in order to reveal “underlying

²¹ See for instance: N. Alloway, ‘Early childhood education encounters the postmodern: What do we know? What can we count as ‘true’?’, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. 22 (2) (1997), 1 – 5; M. N. Bloch, ‘Critical perspectives on the historical relationship between child development and early childhood research’, in S. Kessler, & B. B. Swadener (eds.), *Reconceptualizing the Early Childhood Curriculum: Beginning the Dialogue* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 3 – 20; J. Brady, *Schooling Young Children: A Feminist Pedagogy for Liberatory Learning* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1995); G. S. Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education: Social Justice and Revolution* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); G. Dahlberg, P. Moss, & A. Pence, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Postmodern Perspectives* (London: Falmer Press, 1999); H. A. De Lair, & E. Erwin, ‘Working perspectives within feminism and early childhood education’, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 1 (2) (2000), 153 – 170; S. G. Goffin, ‘Child development knowledge and early childhood teacher preparation: Assessing the relationship — a special collection’, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. 11 (1996), 117 – 133; S. Lubeck, ‘Deconstructing “child development knowledge” and “teacher preparation”’, *Early Childhood Quarterly*. 11 (1996), 147 – 176; S. Lubeck, ‘On reassessing the relevance of the child development knowledge base to education: A response’, *Human Development*. 43 (4/5) (2000), 273 – 278.

values, biases, and beliefs that have generated particular views”.²² In particular, deconstructionist orientated studies have been valuable for making visible how power operates through ECEC, and how ECEC may be contributing to social inequity.

My work addresses a gap in the literature by providing an Australian perspective. Much of the existing deconstruction work originates from Britain, the United States and Europe.²³ There has been little deconstruction work examining ECEC in the Australian context. Although there are many similarities between the United States, Britain and Europe and Australia, the historical, social and political contexts are nevertheless quite different and may have led to the constitution of quite distinct constructs of ECEC. As such, previous deconstructionist work may be irrelevant for the Australian context. My study, by providing an understanding of the ways ECEC is constructed in NSW, enables comparisons to be made between various contexts.

My study also broadens our understanding about the multiplicity of ECEC. Much of the existing deconstructionist work is limited by its tendency to concentrate on readily recognisable constructs of ECEC. In particular, the early work focused on scientific and economic constructs.²⁴ But other constructs are possible. Rather than focus only on one or two constructs of ECEC, I identify and critically examine the multiple ways ECEC is constructed in one context — NSW — and the conditions that give rise to these

²² S. Grieshaber, & G. S. Cannella, ‘From identity to identities: Increasing possibilities in early childhood’, in S. Grieshaber, & G. S. Cannella (eds.), *Embracing Identities in Early Childhood Education: Diversity and Possibilities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 3 – 22, p.11.

²³ See for instance (in Britain) J. Brannen, & P. Moss (eds.), *Rethinking Children’s Care* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003); (in US) M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / Early Childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998); (in Europe), M. Vandenbroek, ‘From crèches to childcare: Constructions of motherhood and inclusion/exclusion in the history of Belgium infant care’, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 4 (2) (2003), 137 – 148.

²⁴ See for instance: Alloway, ‘Early childhood education encounters the postmodern’; Bloch, ‘Critical perspectives on the historical relationship between child development and early childhood research’; Goffin, ‘Child development knowledge and early childhood teacher preparation’: Lubeck ‘Deconstructing “child development knowledge” and “teacher preparation”’.

constructs. Such knowledge about the diverse ways ECEC is constructed is crucial for advocates, who need to both appreciate that ECEC may hold different meanings for different people, and recognise from where these meanings emerged.

To my knowledge, my study represents the first deconstructionist history of ECEC in NSW. Previous deconstructionist histories in other contexts, such as those by Ailwood, Cannella, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Vandenbroek, which I discuss in Chapter One, have proven valuable for enabling reflection on present-day constructions of ECEC and for identifying how dominant discourses have throughout history influenced policy and research related to ECEC.²⁵ In a similar way, I use my historical findings to reflect on contemporary ECEC in NSW.

My study also makes a valuable contribution to a second body of work, the history of ECEC in NSW. Unlike the early histories of ECEC, such as Walker's work which tells the 'story' of ECEC as a linear progression through history, I take a more critical approach.²⁶ My work is more in keeping with the critical histories of Kelly and Brennan, who argue, for instance, that ECEC at the turn of the nineteenth century gave

²⁵ J. Ailwood, 'Governing Preschool: Producing and Managing Preschool Education in Queensland Government Schools.' PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2002; Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*; V. Pacini-Ketchabaw, 'The meanings embedded within childcare regulations: A historical analysis', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 6 (1) (2005), 41 – 53; Vandenbroek, 'From crèches to childcare'.

²⁶ See in particular: M. L. Walker, 'The Development of Kindergartens in Australia.' MEd thesis, University of Sydney, 1964. This work has been substantially drawn upon by other authors including: Brennan, 'Child care and Australian social policy'; M. Clyde, 'The development of kindergartens in Australia at the turn of the twentieth century: A response to social pressures and educational influences', in R. Wollons (ed.), *Kindergartens and Cultures: The Global Diffusion of an Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 87-112; R. Harrison, *Sydney Kindergarten Teachers College 1897 – 1981* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers Kindergarten College Graduates Association, 1985). See also, E. Mellor, *Stepping Stones: The Development of Early Childhood Services in Australia* (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990).

middle-class women positions of power.²⁷ I revisit many of the primary sources examined by these earlier histories and offer an alternative reading. I focus not only on identifying the multiple constructs of ECEC evident in these texts, and critiquing how power operated through them, but also examine the prevailing social conditions and dominant discourses, in order to understand why ECEC emerged in the ways it did.

My work reveals remarkable similarities between historical and contemporary constructs of ECEC in NSW, challenging the supposed naturalness of contemporary constructs and enabling them to be opened to scrutiny. Moreover, my work suggests that the dominant discourses within which ECEC first emerged at the turn of the twentieth century continue to shape ECEC today. Below, I outline the major arguments in each of the following chapters.

Outline of Chapters

A significant part of my doctoral journey has been my engagement with two ways of viewing the world, social constructionism and historical perspectives. Because these two ways of knowing were foundational to my study, I begin my thesis with a discussion of my theoretical orientation. In Chapter One, I provide a detailed discussion of my social constructionist perspective to meaning making and how these understandings inform my examination of ECEC. I also make a case for using history to critique the present.

²⁷ For an analysis of the history of child care from a Marxist perspective see J. Kelly, 'Not Merely Minded: Care and Education for the Young Child of Working Women in Sydney: The Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association, 1905 – 1945.' PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1988.

Chapter Two describes my methodology. There are no set methods for social constructionist historical studies.²⁸ Whilst this lack of restriction has been liberating, it has also been intimidating, as I have had to grapple with multiple perspectives to identify a method of analysis which best suits my study. In this chapter, I justify the use of social constructionist discourse analysis for my study and outline my method. My goals in Chapters One and Two are to ground the study within theoretical paradigms and provide a sound rationale for my method of analysis.

In order to historicise the present, one must begin by firstly diagnosing the current situation.²⁹ Chapters Three and Four critically review contemporary constructs of ECEC in NSW identified in a diverse range of contemporary texts, which I classify as public, professional and Government sources. These contemporary constructs include ECEC as (i) separate education; (ii) progressive education; (iii) scientific education and care; (iv) socially just education; (v) national work; and (vi) women's work. Due to the lengthy nature of this discussion, Chapter Three examines the first three of these constructs and Chapter Four the last three, but in reality the two chapters form a whole. After describing the constructs identified in the texts, I go on to problematise them, drawing on existing deconstructionist literature to interrogate the ways power operates through them. At the same time I critique the problematisations. My aims in Chapters Three and Four are to establish the ways ECEC is constructed in NSW today, to critique these contemporary constructs, and to raise questions about how each of these constructs emerged.

²⁸ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*.

²⁹ H. L. Dreyfus, & P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (2nd edition with an afterword by and an interview with Michel Foucault) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.119.

Chapters Five to Ten each deal with a construct of ECEC I identify in the historical texts in the period 1893 to 1915. The historical sources are similar to, but broader in scope than those used to identify contemporary constructs. In my problematisation of historical constructs I draw on previous historical work, as well as contemporary deconstructionist literature, to identify the ways power operates. But my analysis of the historical constructs goes beyond the identification and problematisation of these constructs of ECEC to include an unveiling of the discourses that created the spaces whereby these new constructs could 'become'. These chapters therefore represent a situated analysis of the discursive formation of ECEC within a particular 'moment' in history.

Chapter Five examines how education for children younger than six years became separate from that for older children. I show how education for children younger than six years was a feature of NSW's early colonial history, but within the prevailing economic discourses of the economic recession of the 1890s, the education of young children became constructed as a waste of public resources and marginalised outside public provision.

Chapter Six examines the construction of ECEC as progressive education. I discuss how, within liberal / progressive discourses dominant at the turn of the century, there was an imperative to reform education. Within these discourses, Fröebelian Kindergarten became constructed as reflecting liberal / progressive ideals. Subsequently, Free Kindergartens were established to model Fröebelian Kindergarten methods. As Free Kindergartens catered mainly for children younger than school age, they became synonymous with ECEC.

Chapter Seven shows how constructs of Free Kindergarten as scientific education and care emerged from dominant scientific discourses evident in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rise of scientific discourses created new ways of viewing the child and education, and created a space where ECEC could emerge as scientific education and care, based on scientific knowledge and Free Kindergartens could emerge as scientific teaching.

Chapter Eight examines the construct of ECEC as socially just. Previous literature examining this period argues that the women who constructed ECEC as socially just education perpetuated middle-class ways of knowing. In contrast, I argue that whilst ECEC may have upheld dominant power structures, these politically active women were working within the confines of their times to improve the life chances of disadvantaged children and their families.

Chapter Nine examines how ECEC was constructed within nationalistic discourses as work that would benefit the nation. Nationalistic discourses constructed children as valuable assets and at the same time as potentially dangerous threats to society. The chapter illustrates how Kindergarten Union, and to a lesser extent Sydney Day Nursery Association, utilised these discourses to call for a greater interest in children's well-being, and to advocate ECEC on the basis that it could contribute to advancement of Australian society.

Chapter Ten examines the construction of ECEC within gendered discourses as women's work. I argue that although the construction of ECEC in this way may have

served to uphold particular notions of womanhood that favoured the middle-class women who established ECEC, it nevertheless enabled women to enter into the public world. Contemporary ECEC owes a great indebtedness to these politically and socially active women.

Finally, the Discussion draws together the findings of the study. I highlight the remarkable similarities I found between the historical and contemporary constructs, and argue that these similarities exist because, in both periods, ECEC has been shaped by the same discursive framework, consisting of economic, scientific, liberal / progressive, nationalist and gender discourses. I argue that whilst it is possible to transform discourses so that alternative constructs can emerge, the possibilities of what ECEC can 'be' is confined and constrained by this discursive framework. I discuss the implications of these findings for ECEC professionals and policy makers. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of my study, I argue for the usefulness of historical study for addressing issues of the present as well as make suggestions for future research.

Notes About Footnoting and Referencing

I use footnotes throughout the thesis, mainly to refer to sources but also to refer the reader to further literature on a particular topic or to expand points that would be unwieldy in the body of the thesis. The referencing style is based on Instructions for Authors for the journal *History of Education*, slightly modified to accommodate both contemporary and historical sources.³⁰ My aim is to provide clear and consistent references to sources. In relation to historical data, every effort was made to identify the author and date of a document. When the author of a source was unknown, for instance

³⁰ <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/authors/thedauth.asp>.

in the case of an unsigned letter to the editor of a newspaper, the author's name is omitted. I chose not to write 'no author' as it seemed redundant. If documents were undated, an estimate of the date was written, preceded by 'circa'.

All Kindergarten Union sources cited are held in the Kindergarten Union of NSW archives held in the Mitchell Wing of the State Library of NSW. They were accessed with kind permission from KU Children's Services, NSW, Inc. (Appendix 1). I was also kindly given access to the Institute of Early Childhood Collection, at Macquarie University, which holds extensive documents relating The Sydney Kindergarten Teachers' College, established in 1900 by the Kindergarten Union.³¹ Illustrations and photographs used in the thesis, were reproduced with the kind permission of *The Bulletin* and KU Children's Services Inc. (Appendices 2 and 3).

I conclude this Introduction by reflecting on the intensely personal nature of my doctoral journey.

A Personal Journey

My work for this study has taken me into new and (for me) dangerous territories of postmodernism and historical research. My struggles with these theoretical orientations have fundamentally changed the ways I view and think about the world. I have experienced disequilibrium as I tried to reconcile these new ways of thinking with my previous understandings. I have been fraught with anxiety, as I doubted my capacity to interpret these complex, and sometimes seemingly impenetrable, bodies of work. I have been filled with pessimism as I came to realise how ECEC, both in the past and today,

³¹ Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, *The Story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, 1911).

has contributed to social injustice by upholding inequitable practices and ways of knowing. I have suffered the pain of uncertainty as my formally held beliefs were shattered. In many ways, I am a different person to the one who embarked on this journey.

But ultimately it has been a most rewarding experience. My journey into the past has filled me with the greatest respect and admiration for the pioneering women who established ECEC in NSW. In ways that I never dreamt possible a few years ago, I feel a sense of connectedness to these women, and to a profession that I value and esteem. By identifying similarities between historical and contemporary constructs of ECEC, I have been able to recognise connections between the past and present. I have come to appreciate how the discourses within which ECEC first emerged continue to shape, confine, constrain and delimit the possibilities of ECEC in NSW. At first glance these ideas might be interpreted as nihilistic. But in fact, my new ways of seeing the world have left me with a liberating sense of balance and calm. I now recognise that what I might consider an 'ultimate' construct of ECEC, one that is fair and just for all, is unattainable. No construct is ever value free. All we can ever do is operate within the discourses of our day, to advocate for ECEC that we believe is the most fair and just. In the end, my thesis journey has led me to truly appreciate the importance of understanding different points of view, to recognise the limitations placed on ECEC, and to advocate negotiation and compromise.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDINGS

As outlined in the Introduction, this thesis aims to contribute to understandings about early childhood education and care (ECEC) in NSW by historicising the present. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence contend that: “‘Making sense of what is going on’ within postmodernity is about the construction or making of meaning”.¹ I am concerned with understanding the ‘meanings’ of ECEC, in particular — *What does ECEC mean in NSW today? What are the consequences of those meanings? and How did these meanings emerge?* I have two central concerns in this chapter. First, I outline my theoretical understandings about the processes by which meanings are constructed, both generally, and specifically in relation to ECEC. These understandings are informed by social constructionist perspectives.² Second, I argue that historical research is useful for examining contemporary conditions of ECEC. My ideas are influenced by the concept of historicising the present.

The chapter is divided into two parts. In part one, I begin by defining the term social constructionism and outlining three major ideas that underpin the social constructionist position I take in this thesis, namely that (i) multiple meanings exist for any phenomena; (ii) meanings are constituted within discourses, and; (iii) power operates through discourses. My social constructionist position is informed by postmodern and poststructural theories. Advocates of socially just education have raised concerns about a multiple realities perspective. I discuss these critiques at some length and argue that

¹ G. Dahlberg, P. Moss, & A. Pence, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Postmodern Perspectives* (London: Falmer Press, 1999), p.107.

² V. Burr, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (London: Routledge, 1995); K. J. Gergen, *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994); K. J. Gergen, ‘Construction and realism: How are we to go on?’, in I. Parker (ed.), *Social Constructionism, Discourse and Realism* (London: Sage, 1998), 147 - 155.

despite these concerns, social constructionism is a useful orientation for identifying the ways power operates through constructs of ECEC to contribute to social inequalities. To illustrate the usefulness of a multiple realities perspective, I discuss studies focusing on the social construction of childhood.

In part two, I contend that in order to understand contemporary constructs of ECEC, an examination of the historical constitution of ECEC — a “history of the present”³ — is particularly valuable. Historical examination can make visible the hidden assumptions that underlie contemporary constructs, enabling these so called ‘truths’ to be challenged. I begin by outlining what I mean by ‘historicising the present’. Next, I discuss five major ideas about history that inform my historical analysis, namely that (i) history is a field of heterogeneous events; (ii) constructs are historically contingent; (iii) history is not a story of progress; (iv) historical study is subjective; and (v) history of the present focuses on the present.

Part One: Social Constructionist Understandings about Meanings

In this thesis I take a social constructionist orientation to meaning. Social constructionism is an umbrella term used to refer to a number of theoretical perspectives, from several disciplines, that have been informed by postmodernist and poststructuralist ideas. Social constructionism views meanings as social constructs, constituted within discourse.⁴ Amongst the first to use the term social constructionism were Berger and Luckman, in their investigation into social knowledge.⁵ Their use of

³ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (A. Sheridan Trans) (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 31.

⁴ K. J. Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction* (London: Sage, 1999); M. Jørgensen, & L. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (London: Sage, 2002).

⁵ P. L. Berger, & T. Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1966).

‘social constructionism’, however, differs from that in this thesis. Whereas Berger and Luckman used the term to refer to their perspective that reality is subjectively constituted within the social context, in this thesis social constructionism refers to a perspective that views meaning not as subjectively constructed but rather as constructed and constituted within discourse. This idea will be explored more fully further on.

Social constructionism as used in this thesis also differs from constructivism. Constructivism is a perspective most often associated with Piaget’s cognitive theory, but also with Vygotskian ideas of thinking and reasoning.⁶ Constructivism views the mind as constructing reality, albeit in relationship with an external world.⁷ This is quite different from a social constructionist perspective in which discourse is “the vehicle through which the self and the world is articulated”.⁸ In social constructionism, the psychological ‘self’ and all meanings are considered to be constructed within discourse.

A number of writers who have critiqued ECEC practices in recent years, and whose work is discussed in Chapters Three and Four, can be referred to as coming from a social constructionist perspective.⁹ Although these writers may not themselves refer to their work as social constructionist, the term social constructionism is used here because it conveniently captures a number of diverse perspectives that share a common

⁶ Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*.

⁷ R. S. Siegler, *Children’s Thinking* (3rd ed.) (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998).

⁸ Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, p.60.

⁹ See for instance: G. S. Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education: Social Justice and Revolution* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); Dahlberg *et al.*, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*; S. G. Goffin, ‘Child development knowledge and early childhood teacher preparation: Assessing the relationship - a special collection’, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. 11 (1996), 117 - 133; M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson, (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / Early Childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998); S. Lubeck, ‘Deconstructing “child development knowledge” and “teacher preparation”’, *Early Childhood Quarterly*. 11 (1996), 147 - 176; S. Lubeck, ‘On reassessing the relevance of the child development knowledge base to education: A response’, *Human Development*. 43 (4/5) (2000), 273 - 278; P. Moss, J. Dillon, & J. Stathan, ‘The ‘child in need’ and ‘the rich child’: Discourses, constructions and practice’, *Critical Social Policy*. 20 (2) (2000), 233 - 254.

understanding — that meanings are actively constituted within discourse.¹⁰ Furthermore, it is a term already recognised within ECEC literature. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence for instance, use the term “postmodern *social constructionist* perspective” to describe the theoretical orientation that they take when examining the meaning of ECEC.¹¹ What follows is a discussion of three major ideas of social constructionism that underpin my critical examination of contemporary ECEC.

Multiple Meanings Exist for any Phenomenon

In this section I discuss the social constructionist position that multiple meanings exist for any phenomena. This position has been profoundly informed by postmodern and poststructuralist theorising which has presented fundamental challenges to the ways meaning is conceptualised. In Western societies, objective, rational thought and investigation have come to be seen as the major vehicles through which we can arrive at ‘truthful’ explanations of the world and through which societies ultimately progress. This way of seeing the world reflects Enlightenment ideals that aim to identify universal truths.¹² But these ideals have come to be challenged by postmodernism.

This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of postmodern ideas; but there are certain postmodern understandings that inform my work and must therefore be explored. Of particular influence is postmodernism’s denial that there are, or ever can be, ultimate unchanging truths which extend beyond cultural explanations of reality.¹³

¹⁰ Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*; Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*.

¹¹ Dahlberg *et al.*, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*, p.55 [emphasis in the original].

¹² N. Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968).

¹³ R. Appignanesi, C. Garrat, Z. Sarder, & P. Curry, *Postmodernism for Beginners* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1995); T. Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); Hampson, *The Enlightenment*; H. A. Giroux (ed.), *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural*

That is, from a postmodernist perspective the knowledge on which 'truths' are based cannot be separated from the broader historical, social and political context in which they are forged. Justification is always context related.¹⁴ For instance, the questions we ask, the manner in which we ask them and the way we seek to address questions, are determined by the context and the language available to us. Moreover, knowledge, far from being fixed, is continually changing. So our understanding of the world is always temporary and in a state of constant flux. Instead of one true reality, postmodernism argues that there are multiple realities.

My engagement with postmodern ideas marked a critical turning point in my understanding of the world. These ideas opened my eyes to different ways of viewing the world; they challenged my previous certainty and forced me to recognise the socially constructed nature of truths. In particular, these understandings led me to challenge and question existing ideas about ECEC. As such, postmodern ideas were foundational to my work in this thesis. There are, however, criticisms of postmodernist ideas. Of particular concern here is postmodernism's denial of truth and its perspective of multiple realities, which are said to be problematic for those wishing to take a social justice stance. I address this concern below.

Are Postmodern Perspectives Problematic for a Social Justice Orientation?

Habermas is one of the major critics of postmodernism.¹⁵ Habermas is committed to The Enlightenment ideals that have been rejected by postmodernism. He says that, as

Politics: Redrawing Educational Boundaries (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991); P. Waugh (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992).

¹⁴ S. Lovibond, 'Feminism and postmodernism', in T. Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 390 - 430.

¹⁵ Docherty, *Postmodernism*.

yet, modernity is an “unfinished project”, and argues that postmodernism’s negation of modernity is premature, as modernity is a still unfolding project which promises potential benefits for all humanity.¹⁶ For Habermas, it is important to maintain the ideals of the Enlightenment so that we can work towards a more equitable and just society. He believes this is only possible by achieving an enlightened consensus. According to Norris, Habermas views enlightened consensus, not just as a pragmatic agreement or consensus of ideas, values and beliefs, but rather as “an agreement aimed at enlightenment, through democratic and participatory exchange on issues of shared concern for humanity”.¹⁷ It could be argued, for instance, that any construct of ECEC that aims for social justice must have some shared understanding of what ‘is’ socially just. Postmodernism’s denial of ultimate truths could be seen as anathema to this position.

Similarly to Habermas, Norris holds that the logical endpoint of a postmodern society is a liberal pluralist position, in which no position is considered more truthful than any other.¹⁸ Such views have led to postmodernist ideas of multiple realities being criticised as banal, nihilistic and relativistic.¹⁹ Norris cautions that postmodernism then, “carries some dubious ethical and socio-political implications”.²⁰ In a similar way, Burman and Parker warn that postmodernism’s dismissal of universal truth, whilst valuable for

¹⁶ J. Habermas, ‘Modernity: An incomplete project’, in T. Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 98 - 109, p.93.

¹⁷ C. Norris, *Deconstruction and the ‘Unfinished Project of Modernity’* (London: The Athelone Press, 2000), p.8.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Appignanesi et. al. *Postmodernism for Beginners*; Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*.

²⁰ Norris, *Deconstruction and the ‘Unfinished Project of Modernity’*, p.12.

disrupting truth claims, becomes problematic when one wishes to elaborate a position or to privilege a commitment to one reading.²¹

Postmodernist ideas have particular implications for education. Education requires an understanding of individual subjectivity, a commitment to particular ways of knowing, and a belief in human capacity to progressively develop a 'truer' understanding of the self and the world. In this way, "education is very much the dutiful child of the Enlightenment".²² As Usher and Edwards point out: "Historically education can be seen as the vehicle by which modernity's 'grand narratives', the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, individual freedom, progress and benevolent change, are substantiated and realised".²³ Postmodernism challenges these ideals. From postmodernist perspectives, not only is the possibility of objectively knowing the mind denied, but the very concept of individual subjectivity is brought into question. For educationalists, it is essential to 'know' the mind and the processes by which the mind changes in order to bring about individual and social improvement. The denial of individual subjectivity is, therefore, problematic.

Further, postmodernism's abandonment of ultimate truth means we need to recognise that multiple perspectives have a right to exist. One consequence of this stance is its implication for a social justice orientation to education. If there are no ultimate or true meanings of ECEC, then how can particular visions of ECEC be advocated over others? Which construct of ECEC, for instance, is the 'best', 'fairest' or 'most right'? From postmodern perspectives such comparison could be seen as problematic — if all

²¹ E. Burman, & I. Parker (eds.), *Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action* (London: Routledge, 1993).

²² R. Usher, & R. Edwards, *Postmodernism and Education* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.24.

²³ *ibid*, p.2.

realities are considered equally valid: no one construct of ECEC can be seen as better than the next.²⁴

Lastly, postmodernism has challenged the notion of humanity's progress.²⁵ Although many postmodernist thinkers recognise that modernism has made a number of significant changes that have benefited humankind, they argue that some changes have been detrimental. For instance, despite our technological advances in medicine and science, many people continue to live in abject poverty and to die of preventable diseases, while degradation of the environment is occurring the world over. Such situations mitigate against a view of the world as progressing.²⁶ Questioning progress threatens to undermine the very process of education, which has traditionally been viewed as a linear, upward, progressive process leading to improvement. Postmodernism, then, can be viewed as antithetical to the ideals of education.²⁷ Indeed, Carr views postmodernism as having "potentially devastating consequences for education and educationalists".²⁸ But this need not be so.

²⁴ H. Penn (ed.), *Early Childhood Services: Theory, Policy and Practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000). See also A. Schutz, 'Rethinking domination and resistance: Challenging postmodernism', *Educational Researcher*, 33 (1) (2004), 15 - 23.

²⁵ The progressive perspective views modernism, and science in particular, as a civilising force which leads to industrial and cultural progress, and improvement of the social condition. There is a moral optimism that science can improve society and the lives of all people. But postmodernism has questioned the doctrine of progress. For instance, Lyotard, one of the most influential writers of the postmodern, rejects the idea of an overarching narrative that brings together science and history into a story of human development towards emancipation. Lyotard argues that such a narrative would require that science be used only for improving and progressing humanity towards high morality, he contends that science cannot justify itself in these terms. Whereas it is recognised that modernity has made significant changes that have benefited mankind, this does not mean that science and rationality in and of themselves are inherently beneficial (Appignanesi *et. al.* *Postmodernism for Beginners*; Z. Bauman, 'The fall of the legislator', in T. Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 128 - 140; Giroux, *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics*; J-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984; Norris, *Deconstruction and the 'Unfinished Project of Modernity'*).

²⁶ See Bauman, 'The fall of the legislator'.

²⁷ Usher & Edwards, *Postmodernism and Education*.

²⁸ D. Carr (ed.), *Education, Knowledge and Truth: Beyond the Postmodern Impasse* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.4.

Postmodernism's rejection of the liberal-Enlightenment conception of reason, truth and knowledge can be disquieting. It can lead to feelings of uncertainty as one's formally held truths are challenged. Yet, abandonment of truth does not necessarily lead to relativism or nihilism; it can be viewed as liberatory.²⁹ For instance, the notion of multiple meanings can be seen as extremely valuable for educators, as it enables us to recognise "themes of difference, plurality, peculiarity, and irregularity as refreshing changes from past adherence to sameness, universality, and strict rationality".³⁰ So, whereas previously we may have seen only 'one way of knowing', we are now able to conceive of many ways. To illustrate, Martin and Sugarman contend that postmodern understandings, which have filtered into child development discourse, have provided a corrective:

... to the ethnocentrically assumed foundationalism, naïve realism, and rampant individualism of much of North American and European social science, postmodern contextualism, constructionism, and contingency serve to problematize educational and psychological practices in ways that invite consideration of previously marginalized alternatives.³¹

So a social constructionist perspective, based on postmodern understandings of the world, can be viewed as empowering. As Ryan and Grieshaber, say postmodern understandings can assist teachers and students to recognise "the politics of their work as well as the roles that they and educational systems play in perpetuating inequalities".³² Such a view means we no longer have to take established values and meanings for granted. It enables us to acknowledge alternative explanations of reality and ways of being and doing in the world.

²⁹ E. Laclau, 'Politics and the limits of modernity', in T. Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 329 – 343.

³⁰ J. Martin, & J. Sugarman, 'Between the modern and the postmodern: The possibility of self and progressive understanding in psychology', *American Psychologist*. 55 (4) (2000), 397 – 406, p.399.

³¹ *ibid*, p.399.

³² S. Ryan, & S. Grieshaber, 'Shifting from developmental to postmodern practices in early childhood teacher education', *Journal of Teacher Education*. 56 1 (2005), 34 - 45, p.36.

From this perspective of multiple realities, rather than trying to identify one ultimate meaning of ECEC, it instead becomes possible to acknowledge multiple realities and multiple constructions. In so doing, social constructionism has shattered “our comfortable assumptions” enabling us “to play with meaning so that we can ‘see again’”.³³ The question we ask shifts from “What ‘is’ ECEC?” to “What *are* ECEC?”

Importantly, acknowledging and accepting alternative points of view does not mean that we have to accept all truths as equal. We can make moral choices and privilege some ways of being over others. But rather than arguing that there is only one way of ‘being’ and ‘doing’, it is incumbent upon us to argue instead that there may be a preferred way, based on certain criteria that must always be clearly articulated.³⁴

In relation to ECEC, a social constructionist position means that we are able to recognise multiple meanings of ECEC.³⁵ However, we do not have to accept all meanings. We can, for instance, choose to advocate certain meanings on the basis that they are more socially just than others. But this requires a critical approach to the examination of ECEC. We cannot unquestioningly accept established constructions of ECEC. In order to make informed decisions about which constructs to support, it is imperative that we understand how various constructs of ECEC are constituted, and to identify the assumptions on which these constructs are based and the power enacted

³³ Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, p.195.

³⁴ Schutz, ‘Rethinking domination and resistance’.

³⁵ Lubeck and Kezar provide an example of how a multiple realities perspective can be useful for the examination of ECEC. Lubeck and Kezar investigated how the organisational structure of Head Start in the United States was constructed by those within the field. By taking a multiple realities perspective they were able to recognise multiple ideas about how Head Start was structured. Moreover, they recognised how this multiplicity created the opportunity for divergent ways of operating within Head Start (S. Lubeck, & A. Kezar, ‘Constructions of Head Start as an organization: Views from the field’, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 3 (1) (2002), 3 - 18.

within. From a social constructionist perspective, 'discourse' is central to this understanding as will be discussed later.

In the following section I digress slightly to illustrate how a multiple realities perspective has been fruitful in the field of sociology of childhood, by examining briefly the ways childhood has been viewed as a socially constructed phenomena. This is not meant to be a comprehensive discussion of the literature, neither am I suggesting that the writers cited below took a postmodern perspective. Rather, my aim is to illustrate how an orientation to meaning as socially constructed has led to an understanding that multiple constructs of childhood exist. Further, the most recent of this work has sought to identify the ways power operates through these constructs to create different subjective positions for children.

Childhood: An Example of a Socially Constructed Phenomenon

Perhaps Phillipe Ariès was one of the first to recognise the socially constructed nature of childhood.³⁶ Although not a social constructionist in the terms laid out here (for he was not concerned with discourse), Aries did conceive of childhood as being socially constructed. In Ariès' seminal work *Centuries of Childhood*, he challenged the naturalness of the concept of childhood. He argued that childhood was not a fixed entity, but instead conceived of differently in different historical periods. Despite criticisms of Ariès' research (for instance the limited nature of his sources, his tendency to overgeneralise, and his Eurocentricity), his work was nevertheless foundational for the study of the history of childhood.³⁷ Ariès opened up a new way of viewing

³⁶ P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (R. Baldick, Trans.), (London: Jonathon Cape, 1962. Original work published 1960).

³⁷ For a critique of Ariès work see W. A. Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood* (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 1997); C. Jenks, *Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1996).

childhood, that made it possible for others to accommodate multiple constructs of childhood.

Cunningham's work provides examples of how research has built on Ariès' ideas.³⁸ Cunningham, whose archival sources includes artworks, articles in the popular press, contemporaneous literature and parliamentary debates, identifies various constructs of children evident in Western society from the fifteenth century. However, although Cunningham recognises multiple constructs of childhood, he tends to lean towards totalising universal claims. That is, he argues that one construct was dominant in each of the periods examined. A limitation of his thesis, therefore, is that it fails to accommodate the multiple constructs of childhood that must have existed at one time in each period, although he does allow for some overlapping of constructs between periods. Nevertheless, Cunningham's work provides useful examples of how historical research can help identify how constructs change over time.

Similarly, James and Prout assert that: "The social constructionist perspective ... has contributed greatly to our understanding of the cultural relativity of social phenomena".³⁹ They identify multiple constructs of childhood throughout the last hundred years, arguing that: "Concepts of childhood — and their attendant practices, beliefs and expectations about children — are shown to be neither timeless nor universal but, instead, rooted in the past and reshaped in the present".⁴⁰ In addition to

³⁸ H. Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood Since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); H. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow, England: Longman, 1995).

³⁹ A. James, & A. Prout, 'Re-presenting childhood: Times and transition in the study of childhood', in A. James, & A. Prout (eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: The Falmer Press, 1997), 230 - 250, p.231.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p.232.

showing how meanings of childhood vary across time and place, James and Prout also highlight how the concept of childhood cannot be separated from other variables such as gender, ethnicity or class. Likewise, Hendrick examines how the construct of childhood is influenced by the political context. Hendrick argues that at different times in history, the construction of childhood shifts in order to 'fit' the political agenda. Indeed, a focus of recent research examining multiple constructs of childhood has been to show how power operates through these constructs.⁴¹

Mason and Steadman provide one example of work that focuses on the way power operates through constructs of childhood. They discuss how the social construction of childhood as a period of dependency and vulnerability has resulted in "asymmetrical relationships, with the weak child necessarily subordinate to the more powerful adult".⁴² They point out that such views have justified paternalistic child protection policy decision-making that neither listens to children nor accepts their contributions. Similarly, Woodrow, and Woodrow and Brennan argue that particular constructions of children (childhood as innocence; children as threat/monster; child as embryo adult)

⁴¹ An understanding of the ways childhood is constructed is particularly important for those concerned with ECEC. As mentioned in the introduction, constructions of ECEC are intimately interwoven with constructions of children. For examples of work examining the social construction of ECEC see for instance: Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*; Dahlberg *et al.*, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*; H. Hendrick, 'Constructions and reconstructions of British childhood: An interpretative survey, 1800 to the present', in A. James, & A. Prout (eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: The Falmer Press, 1997), 35 - 59; H. Hendrick, 'The child as a social actor in historical sources: Problems of identification and interpretation,' in P. Christensen, & A. James (eds.), *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (London: The Falmer Press, 2000), 36 - 61; A. Jamrozik, & T. Sweeney, 'The social construction of childhood', in A. Jamrozik, & T. Sweeney (eds.), *Children and Society: The Family, the State and Social Parenthood* (Melbourne: Macmillan; 1996), 31 - 32; C. Jenks, 'Zeitgeist research on childhood', in P. Christensen, & A. James (eds.), *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (London: The Falmer Press, 2000), 62 - 76; C. Woodrow, 'Revisiting images of the child in early childhood education: Reflections and considerations', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. 24 (4) (1999), 7 - 12.

⁴² J. Mason, & B. Steadman, 'The significance of the conceptualisation of childhood for child protection policy,' *Family Matters*. 46 (1997), 31 - 35, p.34.

have influenced and informed ECEC practices.⁴³ In problematising these constructs, Woodrow shows how ECEC may contribute to the objectification, domination and marginalisation of childhood.⁴⁴

These ideas about the multiple meanings of childhood are important for ECEC educators. The various constructs of childhood have implications for our practice with children. This point is eloquently put by Woodrow who states: “Beliefs we hold about children, and the images of childhood on which we draw, affect our understanding and implementation of our role as early childhood professionals in many ways”.⁴⁵ In much the same way, Moss, Dillon and Statham say: “There are many possible ways of thinking and talking about children and childhood, and ... the choices we make between these possibilities have great consequences for policy and practice — for the lives and subjectivities of children”.⁴⁶ It is essential, therefore, for ECEC educators to understand that current concepts of childhood are the “culminated product of past, present and future understandings of what children have been, are or should be”.⁴⁷ As ECEC educators we need to recognise how these constructs influence our profession.

Moreover, the recognition of multiple meanings of childhood has been valuable for those ‘rethinking’ ECEC. For instance, Cannella begins her deconstruction of the premises and practices underlying ECEC with a discussion of multiple constructions of

⁴³ Woodrow, ‘Revisiting images of the child in early childhood education’; C. Woodrow, & M. Brennan, ‘Interrupting dominant images: Critical and ethical issues’, in J. A. Jipson, & R. T. Johnson (eds.), *Resistance and Representation: Rethinking Childhood Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 23 - 43.

⁴⁴ Woodrow, ‘Revisiting images of the child in early childhood education’.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.7.

⁴⁶ Moss *et al.*, ‘The ‘child in need’ and ‘the rich child’’, p.251.

⁴⁷ James & Prout, ‘Re-presenting childhood’, p.233.

childhood.⁴⁸ Similarly, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence identify different ways 'child' and 'childhood' have been constructed before moving on to a problematisation of several constructs of ECEC.⁴⁹ In a like manner, Moss, Dillon and Statham, and Moss and Petrie are particularly concerned with the construction of children and subsequently how these constructions produce particular constructions of ECEC.⁵⁰ In each of these texts, the identification of multiple constructs of childhood introduces discussions on multiple constructs of ECEC. So a social constructionist perspective of multiple meanings has been fruitful for those critiquing ECEC by providing a 'new lens' through which researchers have been able to recognise multiple constructs of ECEC.

In my examination of contemporary constructs of ECEC, I am not specifically concerned with identifying constructs of childhood. Nevertheless, my work does contribute to this understanding. In Chapters Five to Nine, which examine the constructions of ECEC which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I begin by describing how children were constructed. I then go on to show how these constructions were productive in that they resulted in the emergence of particular constructs of ECEC.

The research examining the historical construction of childhood clearly illustrates how historical research can shed light on contemporary constructs. Historical research into childhood has shown the socially constructed nature of childhood and the power that operates within these constructs. This work has enabled researchers to reflect on how

⁴⁸ Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*.

⁴⁹ Dahlberg *et al.*, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*.

⁵⁰ Moss *et al.*, 'The 'child in need' and 'the rich child''; P. Moss, & P. Petrie, *From Children's Services to Children's Spaces: Public Policy, Children and Childhood* (London: Routledge / Falmer, 2002).

contemporary constructs are shaped by their historical origins. I contend that in the same way, historical research of ECEC can throw light on contemporary constructions of ECEC. I take up this important idea, that contemporary constructs were formed in the past and reshaped in the future, in the discussion of my historical orientation further on in the chapter. Below, I return to my discussion of the ideas which underpin my orientation to meaning making by exploring the second premise of social constructionism, that is, meanings are constituted within discourses.

Meanings are Constituted within Discourses

In this section, I explain my understandings about how meanings of ECEC are constituted within socially, historically and politically contingent discourses. As previously argued, social constructionism denies that truth and meaning are inherent in the world. Consequently, ECEC cannot be considered to have an inherent meaning. Neither, according to a social constructionist perspective, is meaning and reality constructed within the individual at a subjective level. Instead, social constructionism, based on poststructural understandings, claims that meaning and reality are constructed and constituted in language.⁵¹ This is not to deny that the world exists independent of language, but to argue that phenomena can only be understood or become 'reality' once they are named, or constructed, through language, within socially and historically specific discourses.⁵² Therefore, in order to understand the meanings of ECEC, one must turn to the discourses within which ECEC has been constructed.

⁵¹ Jørgensen, & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*; C. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructural Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

⁵² M. O'Shaughnessy, *Media and Society: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); C. Willig (ed.), *Applied Discourse Analysis: Social and Psychological Interventions* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999).

The term ‘discourse’ is used in a number of ways.⁵³ A common understanding underlying social constructionist perspectives is that they are concerned with “the way language creates our worlds”.⁵⁴ But beyond this agreement there is diversity regarding *how* language constructs our world. It is necessary, therefore, to clearly explain what I mean by ‘discourse’.

In the following paragraphs I set out my approach to discourse. I argue, first, that discourses actively construct the world and create spaces in which constructs of ECEC emerge. Next, I argue that discourses operate in a field of discursivity. I then go on to discuss the third premise of my social constructionist position, that power operates through discourses to both create subjective positions, and to obscure our view of ECEC as a discursively constituted phenomenon. It is these understandings that underpin my analysis of ECEC in this study.

Discourses Actively Construct the World

Discourses are coherent systems of meaning. They are bodies of knowledge or ways of viewing the world.⁵⁵ Discourses do not name an already existing reality; rather, they actively constitute reality and meaning.⁵⁶ They categorise, define, produce, construct and bring meaning to objects or concepts and bring phenomena into sight.⁵⁷ They are “practices which systemically form the objects of which they speak”.⁵⁸ As such, all

⁵³ I. Parker, & The Bolton Discourse Network, *Critical Textwork: An Introduction to Varieties of Discourse and Analysis* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999).

⁵⁴ Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, p.64.

⁵⁵ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); I. Parker, *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁵⁶ E. Laclau, & C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London : Verso, 1985); Willig, *Applied Discourse Analysis*.

⁵⁷ S. J. Ball, *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁵⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.49.

concepts including objects, practices and subjectivities are discursively constituted or 'articulated' from discourse and there can be no meaning outside the discourse.⁵⁹ That is, although an object may have an independent reality, *meaning* is ascribed through discourse.⁶⁰ From this perspective, meanings or constructs of ECEC are considered to have emerged within discourses. That is, ECEC is not a fixed essence but is instead contingent upon the historical and social discourses within which it is constructed. A major aim of my study, therefore, was to identify the discourses that give rise to ECEC. I go on to describe how I identify those discourses in the following chapter.

Discourses Operate in a Field of Discursivity

Discourses operate in what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as a "field of discursivity".⁶¹ That is, the social world is made up of a field of different discourses, each of them representing different ways of 'knowing the world'. As such, discourses combine to create a 'superstructure' through which society is articulated. This understanding is represented diagrammatically below (Figure 1).

⁵⁹ V. Burr, 'Overview: Realism, relativism, social constructionism and discourse', in I. Parker (ed.), *Social Constructionism, Discourse and Realism* (London: Sage, 1998), 13 – 25.

⁶⁰ Parker & The Bolton Discourse Network, *Critical Textwork*.

⁶¹ Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p.111.

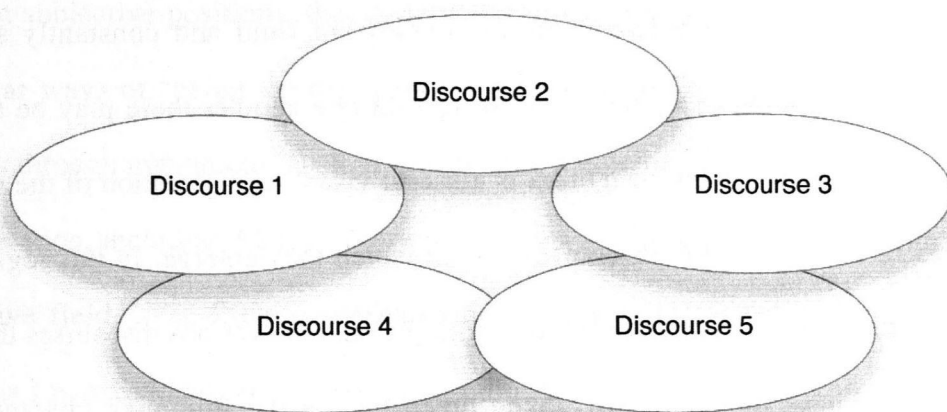


Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of a discursive field.

As illustrated in the following diagram (Figure 2), I envisage the discursive field as creating framework within which multiple constructs of ECEC emerge.⁶² As discourses shift, 'spaces' are created within which new ways of operating may be constituted. These events are conceptualised as local eruptions in the discursive field.⁶³ So that at any one time, a number of discourses are operating which could give rise to different constructs of ECEC.

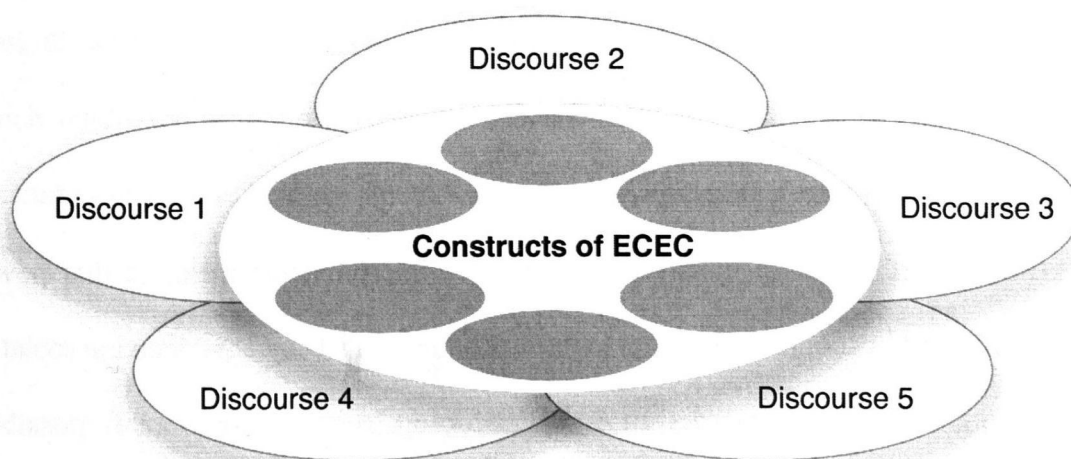


Figure 2: How constructs emerge from the discursive field.

⁶² H. L. Dreyfus, & P Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (2nd edition with an afterword by and an interview with Michel Foucault) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁶³ *ibid.*

The discursive framework is not, however, as clear-cut as my diagram (Figure 2) might suggest. The boundaries between the discourses are fluid and constantly shifting. Moreover, whilst some discourses tend to uphold one another there may be tensions between others. Nevertheless, Figure 2 is a useful visual representation of the multiple constructs of ECEC and the discourses within which they emerge. In this regard, this study aims to identify multiple constructs of ECEC and the various discourses that gave rise to each. These ideas are also taken up further in the following chapter in my discussion of discourse analysis.

The discursive field is a site of struggle. According to Laclau and Mouffe: “Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity”.⁶⁴ There is then, a constant movement as the discourses compete with one another and vie for supremacy. As such, a central concern of this examination of the discursive constitution of ECEC is not only to identify the dominant discourses, but also to look for alternate or ‘silenced’ discourses. It can be seen from the preceding discussion that discourses are integrally related to issues of power. I explore this important idea below.

Power Operates through Discourses

The final aspect of social constructionism that underpins this thesis is that power operates through discourses. Discourses are productive.⁶⁵ They constitute the social world, both objects and subjectivities. In so doing, they define what is possible, knowable and sayable, and rule out other possibilities.⁶⁶ This discursive power can be seen to operate through ECEC in a number of ways.

⁶⁴ Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p.113.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*.

Foucault's work has been particularly valuable for showing how discourses produce different subjective positions, that is, how each discourse serves to create and uphold particular ways of 'being' in the world.⁶⁷ According to Foucault, discursive power operates through institutions, such as law, media, medicine, church, the political system and education, including ECEC. These institutions are located in and structured by the discursive field.⁶⁸ The discourse defines what is permissible, creating subjective positions for individuals within the institution. Discursive power / knowledge is thus "localized on the body" as the unconscious and conscious mind is transcribed, constructed, constituted and controlled within dominant bodies of power / knowledge.⁶⁹ Moreover, power operates to blind us to the ways our subjectivities are constrained and constructed within these discourses. In this way, ECEC services can be considered to be organised spaces that create subjective positions.

At any particular moment in history, certain discourses are more powerful than others. Hegemony is said to exist when one discourse dominates the discursive field.⁷⁰ It is those discourses that justify and maintain the current societal practices and structures which tend to appear more coherent and are thus more powerful. These dominant discourses serve to uphold dominant ways of being, and marginalise 'other' ways.

Moreover, dominant discourses are reinforced by other dominant discourses across the discursive field.⁷¹ That is, there is interdependence or intertextuality among discursive practices within a society or institutions, as discourses that uphold dominant ways

⁶⁷ M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings by Michel Foucault, 1972-1977* (C. Gordon Ed., and Trans), (New York: Pantheon, 1972/1980).

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Dreyfus & Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, p.113.

⁷⁰ Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

⁷¹ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*.

combine and support one another to maintain dominant ways of being.⁷² For example, the dominant discourse of gender, which essentialises femininity as nurturing, and the discourse of child development, which continues to give primacy to the mother child dyad, may be viewed as supporting one another.

That is not to say that all discourses uphold dominant ways of being. There is antagonism between competing discourses. This may account for why certain constructs of ECEC that challenge existing practices will often be viewed as marginal, irrelevant or even dangerous.⁷³ To shift the hegemonic discourse is no easy feat, however. As Hayes says: "Discourse so defines the limits of acceptable thought, speech and behaviour that it requires an act of imagination and courage to think differently".⁷⁴ Consequently, two important foci of interest for this thesis were to identify how power operates through ECEC to create and uphold subjective positions, and to identify positions of resistance.

Power operates through discourses in a second way. As well as upholding dominant ways of being, hegemony also serves a power function, in that it blinds us to 'objectivity'.⁷⁵ All constructs are contingent. That is, they are discursively produced; not fixed truths that transcend cultural explanations. However, some of the assumptions that underlie contemporary constructs have become so ingrained that they are difficult to discern as discursively constructed. We consider them natural and are prevented from

⁷² Burr, 'Realism, relativism, social constructionism and discourse'; R. Wodak, *Disorders of Discourse* (London: Longman, 1996).

⁷³ Burr, 'Overview: Realism, relativism, social constructionism and discourse'.

⁷⁴ D. N. A. Hayes, 'Genealogical tales about educational provision in Australia since colonisation: Tracing the decent of discourses of gender equity', *Australian Educational Researcher*. 27 (1) (2000), 47 - 69.

⁷⁵ Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

seeing alternative positions.⁷⁶ When constructs appear to be so ‘natural’ that we are blinded to alternative positions, in Laclau and Mouffe’s terms they have become ‘objective’.⁷⁷

Objectivity is the historical outcome of political processes and struggles; it is *sedimented* discourse. The boundary between objectivity and the political, or between what seems natural and what is contested, is thus a fluid and historical boundary, and earlier sedimented discourses can, at any time, enter the play of politics and be problematised in new articulations.⁷⁸

Objectivity, then, hides alternative possibilities. In relation to ECEC, some of the assumptions that underlie ECEC have become so objective or natural that we no longer see them as discursively produced. For instance, the very idea of having a separate system of education for children younger than six years seems to be natural, rather than a product of discourses. Therefore, a major concern of this social constructionist research examining ECEC is to highlight the discursive nature of constructs of ECEC, in order that these constructs might be problematised and alternative, perhaps hidden, constructs identified.

To summarise so far, a social constructionist perspective on the ways language constructs our world is valuable for investigations of ECEC. Such a perspective recognises the discursive nature of ECEC. It enables us to understand how these discourses are productive in defining what is possible, correct and acceptable, and how they delimit the possibilities of ECEC. Such a view also recognises how power operates through these discourses to uphold dominant ways of being. As such, certain constructs of ECEC are likely to sustain dominant ways and oppress others. In so doing, these constructs may contribute to social inequity by sustaining injustice and oppression. We

⁷⁶ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*.

⁷⁷ Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

⁷⁸ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, p. 36 [emphasis in the original].

can neither stand outside power, nor do away with it. It is essential, therefore, from a social constructionist perspective to *de-construct* constructs in order to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and to reveal where the power lies. But discourse obscures the nature of constructs, making them appear natural and preventing us from seeing them. Therefore, as Jørgensen and Phillips argue: “In order to identify the taken-for-granted, naturalised ascriptions of meaning, researchers need to distance themselves from them in some way”.⁷⁹

In this thesis I distance myself from contemporary ECEC by adopting an historical approach. As Jørgensen and Phillips go on to say: “By drawing upon historical and anthropological material ‘foreign’ to oneself and one’s own empirical material, one can identify what is taken for granted within it”.⁸⁰ Consequently, an historical approach to the examination of ECEC, by revealing the historically contingent nature of the assumptions underlying ECEC, may shed light on why contemporary practices are constructed in the ways they are. What follows is a discussion of the historical approach I take in this thesis.

Part Two: The Use of History for Critiquing the Present

Historical research can be undertaken for a variety of reasons. It can, for instance, be undertaken to satisfy one’s curiosity; it can even be the result of a fetish of the exotic.⁸¹ However, in this thesis my purpose for looking at the historical constitution of ECEC is to understand contemporary meanings. This orientation to history is based on the recognition that “everything that exists in the present has come out of the past, and no

⁷⁹ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, p.189.

⁸⁰ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, p.194.

⁸¹ M. Stanford, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998).

matter how new and unique it seems to be, it carries some of the past with it".⁸²

Examination of the historical constitution of ECEC is important, therefore, in enhancing understandings of why ECEC is constructed in the ways that it is today.

In the early years of a new millennium, we are perhaps at a particularly fitting time to undertake historical analysis of ECEC. Despite the arbitrary nature of calendar time, the millennium zeitgeist is to look forward to 'new beginnings' and to contemplate new possibilities.⁸³ But it is also imperative that we reflect on where we have come from because, "to have a new vision of the future, it has always first been necessary to have a new vision of the past".⁸⁴ We cannot challenge existing practices unless we know where we have come from, and how we got here. History can help in this quest.

Studying the past may help us understand better how we came to be who we are. These discoveries in turn help us to decide which we want to retain from the past and that which we want to reject. By discovering that our lives are historically conditioned, we find some freedom. We know what is does not have to be this way.⁸⁵

Studying the past not only helps us to understand our current situation better, it also enables us to appreciate that things could be otherwise, and to recognise that those situations we perceive as unfair can be changed.⁸⁶ There are, however, many perspectives regarding the study of history. The perspective that I have found particularly valuable for this examination of the historical constitution of contemporary constructions of ECEC is the notion of historicising the present.⁸⁷ In the following

⁸² J. R. Benjamin, *A Student's Guide to History* (8th ed) (Boston: Bedford / St Martin's, 2001).

⁸³ A. Hargreaves, 'Schooling in the new millennium: Educational research for the postmodern age', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. 20 (3) (1999), 333 - 355.

⁸⁴ T. Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity* (London: Minerva, 1995), p.vii.

⁸⁵ R. Marius, *A Short Guide to Writing about History* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott. Foresman and Company, 1989), pp.4 - 5.

⁸⁶ Willig, *Applied Discourse Analysis*.

⁸⁷ T. S. Popkewitz, M. A. Pereyra, & B. M Franklin, 'History, the problem of knowledge, and the new cultural history of schooling', in T. S. Popkewitz, M. A. Pereyra, & B. M. Franklin (eds.), *Cultural History and Education: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 3 - 42.

section, I define the concept of 'historicising the present' and discuss the five major ideas that inform my historical analysis.

Historicising the Present

History of the present is concerned with understanding and problematising contemporary concepts through historical analysis.⁸⁸ The term "history of the present" was first coined by Foucault.⁸⁹ I use Foucaultian notions of history of the present as a starting point but, for reasons outlined later in this chapter, this study is not a Foucaultian genealogy. Instead, my interpretation of history of the present is more in-keeping with that of Rose who advocates a "looser, more inventive and more empirical" relation to Foucault's work that is "less concerned with being faithful to a source of authority than working with a certain ethos of enquiry, with fabricating some conceptual tools that can be set to work in relation to the particular questions that trouble contemporary thought".⁹⁰ As such, I view history of the present as "a way of thinking about the present, one that attempts to make sense of the complexity of contemporary events by examining what lies behind them".⁹¹ The five ideas that underpin this orientation to history are detailed below.

History is a Field of Heterogenous Events

A history of the present conceives of history as a field of heterogenous events.⁹² As discourses shift in the discursive field, 'spaces' are created within which new ways of

⁸⁸ B. Baker, 'Foucault, historiography, and writing a history of the child: Productive paradoxes', *History of Education Review*. 30 (1) (2001), 17 - 42.

⁸⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.31.

⁹⁰ N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁹¹ Benjamin, *A Student's Guide to History*, p.17.

⁹² Dreyfus & Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*.

operating may be constituted. As such, constructs emerge or erupt from out of the discursive field.⁹³ From this perspective, as discourses shift they create spaces where ‘new’ constructs of ECEC can emerge. One purpose of this history of the present is to attempt to analyse the conditions that gave rise to a new concept of education especially for children in early childhood in the late nineteenth century in NSW.

I contend that contemporary manifestations of ECEC in NSW are shaped by this historical constitution. As Castel says:

The present reflects a conjunction of elements inherited from the past and current innovations. In other words, the present bears a burden, a weight that comes from the past, and the task of the present is to bring this burden up to date in order to understand its current ramifications.⁹⁴

In this way, contemporary ECEC continues to be structured by the effects of its heritage.⁹⁵ The conditions that gave rise to ECEC have made up the logic of what ECEC means — its possibilities.⁹⁶ Many of the ideas underlying contemporary constructs of ECEC remain as remnants of its past historical construction as “continuities of cultural practices”.⁹⁷ So much so, that the assumptions that underlay ECEC, such as the concept of an early childhood period in life; the separation of education for older and younger children; the formation of enclosed spaces for the education of young children; specialised spaces, teachers and curriculum, have become ‘truths’ of ECEC. These ideas are so entrenched that they are taken-for-granted in contemporary discussions about

⁹³ Dreyfus & Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*.

⁹⁴ R. Castel, “‘Problematization’ as a Mode of Reading History”, in J. Goldstein (ed.), *Foucault and the Writing of History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 237 - 252, p.238.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ J. Varela, ‘Genealogy of education’, in T. S. Popkewitz, M. A. Pereyra, & B. M. Franklin (eds.), *Cultural History and Education: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 110 - 150.

⁹⁷ Dreyfus & Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, p.105.

ECEC. Historical analysis contextualises these assumptions, revealing them to be contingent upon particular ways of viewing the world.

By examining its historical origins, this thesis aims to de-naturalise the present — to “unsettle claims about the self-evidence or naturalness” of contemporary ECEC in NSW.⁹⁸ In making “the familiar strange” and demonstrating how ECEC came to be and might have been otherwise, the taken-for-granted nature of ECEC can be politicised and problematised and alternative futures be imagined.⁹⁹

Constructs are Historically Contingent

Constructs are historically contingent.¹⁰⁰ In other words, past constructs are not the same as contemporary constructs. In relation to this study, I do not view contemporary constructs of ECEC as paralleling past practices. Such a ‘presentist’ view of history would take as its reference concepts in the present, and look for exact parallel meanings in the past.¹⁰¹ For example, a presentist history of ECEC would examine historical constructs of ECEC as if they had the same meanings as contemporary ECEC. In contrast, a history of the present orientation to history denies that historical constructs can be examined as if they have parallel contemporary meanings. Just as social constructionist histories of childhood have shown the concept of ‘child’ has been variously constructed throughout history, so too has ECEC meant different things at different times.¹⁰² The history of ECEC is marked by disjunctions, multiple

⁹⁸ G. Kendall, ‘Normality and meaningfulness: Detailing the child in eighteenth-century England’, *History of Education Review*. 30 (2) (2001), 26 - 36, p.26.

⁹⁹ Baker, ‘Foucault, historiography, and writing a history of the child’, p.29.

¹⁰⁰ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*.

¹⁰¹ Popkewitz, *Cultural History and Education*; Stanford, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History*.

¹⁰² See for instance: James & Prout, ‘Re-presenting childhood’.

constructions and contradictions, as there are shifts in the discursive field.¹⁰³ So although many of the assumptions underlying contemporary constructions are manifestations of past constructs, past and present constructions cannot be viewed as having the same meaning.

Genealogical work is concerned with looking back through history and tracing these shifts in the meanings of constructs that occur over time. Genealogies have been conducted in many areas of study including the study of ECEC. Cannella's work, for instance, involves a genealogy of childhood.¹⁰⁴ Cannella's genealogy shows how childhood has been constructed differently in different times and enables her to question the assumption that childhood is a separate and distinct period from adulthood.

Likewise, Ailwood conducts a genealogy of pre-school education in Queensland, Australia, in order to identify "the conditions of possibility in which preschool education in Queensland emerged and changed".¹⁰⁵ Ailwood first discusses how socially constructed childhoods and discourses of gender, science and play, create rationalities for preschool education. She then goes on to identify how, in the early years of preschool education in Queensland, discourses of Froebelian kindergarten, philanthropy and Empire were productive; whilst in the 1930s compensatory discourses were dominant and in the 1970s, feminism. Ailwood shows how these discourses remain evident in contemporary texts about preschool education in Queensland, along with the

¹⁰³ Kendall, 'Normality and meaningfulness'; T. S. Popkewitz, & M. Brennan (eds.), *Foucault's Challenge: Discourse, Knowledge, and Power in Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁴ Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*.

¹⁰⁵ J. Ailwood, 'Governing Preschool: Producing and Managing Preschool Education in Queensland Government Schools.' PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2002, p.8.

discourses of change, postmodernism and globalisation. The genealogical approach enables Ailwood to show how the rationalities for preschool education shift over time.

In a similar way, Vandenbroek, who says he is influenced by “social constructionism and Foucault’s ideas about power”, examines the history of exclusion in Belgian infant care.¹⁰⁶ He highlights how in different historical periods Belgian policies on the provision of infant care have been influenced by dominant discourses and that these policies have tended to exclude those from the lowest socio-economic or marginalised groups.

The work of Cannella, Ailwood and Vandenbroek is useful for it provides examples of how examination of the history of ECEC “helps in the understanding of present day discourses on childcare”.¹⁰⁷ But a concern with these genealogies is that they tend to be narrowly focused. In attempts to trace changes, they do not allow for thorough investigation of the multiple constructs evident in any one time, nor to the discourses which gave rise to those constructs.

Originally this thesis was conceptualised as a genealogy. That is, I had intended to examine the construction of ECEC in several discrete periods. But it soon became apparent that this approach did not allow for thorough investigation of each period. So rather than trying to examine changes throughout history, this study focuses only on the period when separate institutions for ECEC first emerged in NSW. It is, then, an analysis situated in a particular historical period, rather than a genealogical analysis.

¹⁰⁶ M. Vandenbroek, ‘From crèches to childcare: Constructions of motherhood and inclusion/exclusion in the history of Belgium infant care’, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 4 (2) (2003), 137 - 148.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p. 137.

This focus of analysis has proven useful elsewhere. In particular, Pacini-Ketchabaw traces the meanings of ‘childcare’ within a document regulating the provision of childcare in Canada, the Day Nurseries Act (DNA).¹⁰⁸ She looks in detail at the “social and demographic conditions” of the early twentieth century that made the enactment of the DNA possible.¹⁰⁹ Her findings, which I discuss in more detail in the following chapter, suggest that the discourses evident in the early twentieth century “remain embedded within the current Act”, thus illustrating how examination of the historical constitution of ECEC can shed light on current understandings.¹¹⁰

History is Not a Story of Progress

History of the present does not view history as a story of progress. A progressive view of history is based on dominant Western ideas that history is linear, sequential and progressive.¹¹¹ This position would necessitate any future constructs of ECEC to be viewed as improvements on what went before. Yet, as has been discussed previously, in the postmodern, the doctrine of social and cultural progress is questioned and the notion of progress as an optimistic end time is abandoned.¹¹² ‘New’ does not necessarily mean ‘improved’.

Further, a progressive view of history requires not only that society improves, but that there be a common understanding as to ‘where’ history was progressing — a futuristic

¹⁰⁸ V. Pacini-Ketchabaw, ‘The Meanings Embedded within Childcare Regulations: A Historical Analysis’, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 6 (1) (2005), 41 - 53.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, p.41.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, p.42.

¹¹¹ Stanford, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History*.

¹¹² Appignanesi *et al.*, *Postmodernism for Beginners*; Bauman, ‘The fall of the legislator’; Docherty, *Postmodernism*; Giroux, *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics*; Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.

idealism.¹¹³ Foucault has rejected the notion of history working towards a universal Utopia, as such a notion would require a totalising concept of what is 'good' for human existence.¹¹⁴ Such a position is unsustainable in postmodernity. This is why it is essential, when one wishes to advocate a social justice position, to clearly articulate changes to ECEC in terms of equity and justice.

A progressive perspective of history would view past constructs of ECEC much as seeds growing and transforming through history to present day 'flowers'.¹¹⁵ This view, which is evident in several histories of ECEC mentioned in the Introduction, tends rather patronisingly from a contemporary perspective, to see past constructs as quaint, 'primitive' or less well developed.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, these studies, in keeping with modernist conceptions of history, tend to be linear accounts that fail to recognise the connections between past and contemporary constructs of ECEC and how previous constructs continue to exert force in the present. In contrast, in this history of the present of ECEC, I consider past constructions of ECEC on their own terms as manifestations of an historically contingent discursive environment. But at the same time I recognise that the assumptions underlying these constructions continue to manifest in contemporary constructs.

¹¹³ Appignanesi *et al.*, *Postmodernism for Beginners*; Norris, *Deconstruction and the 'Unfinished Project of Modernity'*.

¹¹⁴ Dreyfus & Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*.

¹¹⁵ Stanford, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History*.

¹¹⁶ See for instance: R. Harrison, *Sydney Kindergarten Teachers College 1897 - 1981* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers Kindergarten College Graduates Association, 1985); J. Kelly, 'Not Merely Minded: Care and Education for the Young Child of Working Women in Sydney: The Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association, 1905 - 1945.' PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1988; V. C. Lascarides, & B. F. Hinitz, *History of Early Childhood Education* (New York: Falmer Press, 2000).

Historical Study is Subjective

Despite historians' attempts to carefully and objectively 'get at the truth' of the past, historical examination cannot be viewed as an objective science; rather it is a highly subjective process. Foucault's historiography has been particularly influential in challenging objectivity in the study of history.¹¹⁷ Foucault highlighted how historical study is essentially a narrative.¹¹⁸ It is the study of text, and is itself a textual representation.¹¹⁹ For instance, historians' selection and examination of texts is a subjective interpretation.¹²⁰ Further, historical data is not only dependent upon what is available to the historian, it is also influenced by who wrote that material.¹²¹ As such, historical examination can never be a true representation of the past — only an interpretation.

Further, our understandings of the past are tempered by our contemporary understandings as well as our hopes for the future. Consequently, claims of truth and

¹¹⁷ These debates between those who consider history to be a truthful retelling of a knowable past, and those who consider history to be a recreation of the past, have culminated in what Warren describes as a "bitterly-contested war zone" (J. Warren, *The Past and its Presenters: An Introduction to Issues in Historiography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), p.1). See Warren for a lucid and concise discussion of postmodernism's challenge to history. Warren outlines postmodernist ideas and then goes on to say how these arguments challenge the discipline and practice of history. Warren also includes details of the major debates between Carr and Elton, two significant figures in the theorising of history. Foucault's work has been at the centre of much of this debate and has itself come under fierce criticism. Some conservative historians view Foucault's work as anti-historical (A. Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997). This is both because of his "refusal to privilege the modernist conception of scientific truth and traditional categories of evidentially determined analysis" as well as "his denial of linear historical causality between events and epochs" (Munslow, p.120). For many, Foucault's history "can seem unruly, because it does not obey some of the conventions of historiography" (Kendall, 'Normality and meaningfulness', p.26). But critiques of Foucault based on arguments that he does not pay due regard to historical 'reality' are unsustainable, because it was not his intention to tell the 'truths' of history. For Foucault, "the point is not so much to arrive at a replacement knowledge, as to disrupt the certainties of the present: a profoundly sceptical move" (Kendall, 'Normality and meaningfulness', p.26).

¹¹⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Foucault, *Power*.

¹¹⁹ Munslow, *Deconstructing History*.

¹²⁰ M. Pryke, G. Rose, & S. Whatmore (eds.), *Using Social Theory: Thinking through Research* (London: Sage, 2003).

¹²¹ The historian is dependent on archival sources. The survival of archives is circumstantial, for instance, they are reliant on archivists' judgement of what is worthy enough to be saved.

objectivity in historical research are untenable, as this would require a detached, omnipotent portrayal of past events. Such a position is impossible to reach. I consider my historical study to be a subjective, but nonetheless, critical examination of ECEC, rather than an objective quest for the truth of a singular history of ECEC.

History of the Present Focuses on the Present.

History of the present focuses on the present. For several critics of Foucault's historiography, and more broadly historical work that is present orientated, a focus on the present is problematic.¹²² In particular, Castel highlights that it may be 'presentist' to project present concerns onto the past, as these present concerns might guide us in particular ways.¹²³ As such, we need to be particularly cautious of how our contemporary concerns might influence our decisions to include or exclude constructs or even how this might blind us from seeing particular constructs. Similarly, Baker argues that we may only be able to 'see' historical constructs by having a-priori understanding.¹²⁴ So that, for instance, our ability to see constructs of ECEC in the past may be predisposed by our understanding of contemporary constructs. It is possible, also, that we might be oblivious to previous constructs that are not evident today.

Castel also points out that those who attempt to undertake histories of the present are, by and large, not historians. He cautions that those of us who are not historians need to have "humility towards historical work and history as a profession".¹²⁵ Consequently, we must ensure that our work is supported, and not contradicted, by historical

¹²² Baker, 'Foucault, historiography, and writing a history of the child'.

¹²³ Castel, "'Problematization' as a Mode of Reading History".

¹²⁴ Baker, 'Foucault, historiography, and writing a history of the child'; Castel, "'Problematization' as a Mode of Reading History".

¹²⁵ Castel, "'Problematization' as a Mode of Reading History", p.240.

knowledge. To this end, in my analysis, historical studies are frequently referred to, to provide confirming evidence.

I acknowledge that this historical analysis of ECEC will be influenced both by my knowledge of what ECEC has become and how I envisage a future for ECEC. For instance, it may well be that my examination of past constructs, whilst simultaneously examining the present, influenced my analysis and resulted in my finding the remarkable similarities between past and present constructs of ECEC alluded to in the Introduction. I also recognise that this historical analysis is only one possible interpretation of the past; there could be many others. Rather than assuming an unattainable objectivity, my aim instead is to provide reliable, realistic data in support of my interpretation and to be honest and open in my interpretation.¹²⁶ And so despite concerns about the subjective and presentist nature of some historical research, this historical analysis of ECEC is useful. By exploring and critiquing the construction of ECEC within historical discourses, the study reveals how power operated through these constructs. It also sheds light on how many of the 'truths' of contemporary constructs of ECEC in NSW are historically constituted, and thus enables these truths to be challenged.

In short, history of the present is an orientation to history that sees present constructs as connected to the past. It is concerned with the discursive constitution of constructs and the primacy of texts as sources. History of the present recognises that histories are subjective. But, above all, history of the present is marked by a desire to unsettle truths of contemporary practice.

¹²⁶

L. Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000).

Conclusion to Chapter One

To summarise, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the deconstruction of contemporary ECEC in NSW through historical analysis. It aims to make visible the historically constituted nature of the assumptions underlying contemporary constructions of ECEC by historicising the present. This examination aims to identify the dominant discourses that gave rise to constructions of ECEC, and the power that operated through these constructions. By identifying the discourses within which ECEC was first constituted, the study aims to elucidate the power / knowledge that generated possibilities for ECEC and perhaps are still constricting it. Once identified as historically constituted, the naturalness of these contemporary constructs, and the power relations they support, can be challenged and problematised.

However, there is no prescribed framework or a model of analysis for historicising the present. Consequently, researchers who aim to historicise the present have to develop their own methods for analysis. In this thesis, in keeping with my social constructionist orientation to meaning making, my method of analysis is discourse analysis. In the following chapter I outline my approach to discourse analysis.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

As indicated previously, the purpose of this thesis is to critically examine contemporary constructs of ECEC by historicising the present. This examination required analysis of the ways ECEC was constructed both in contemporary and historical New South Wales (NSW) contexts. But, as explained in the previous chapter, there are no prescribed analytical frameworks for histories of the present. It is necessary, therefore, to clearly establish the method of analysis used in this thesis.

The method of analysis I use here is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis can be variously interpreted. In this chapter I explain what I mean by discourse analysis, and argue that it is an appropriate means of analysis for this study because it: (i) unmasks the naturalness of constructs so that they might be challenged; (ii) makes visible the power that underlies these constructions; (iii) identifies positions of resistance; and (iv) recognises the dynamic nature of constructs. I then outline the ‘objects’ of discourse analysis before going on to discuss studies that have previously utilised discourse analysis to investigate ECEC, highlighting the differences between this work and mine. Finally, I describe the data sources and specific techniques used in this study. My overall aims in this chapter are to provide a sound theoretical justification for my examination of contemporary constructs of ECEC through historical, social constructionist discourse analysis, and to establish my method of analysis.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a difficult concept.¹ It is a term used to cover a range of approaches to the analysis of texts from a diverse range of theoretical perspectives, including for instance, structuralism, poststructuralism, feminism and Marxism.² Each of these approaches is dependent upon a particular concept of discourse. As discussed in the previous chapter, in this thesis, discourses are conceived of as coherent systems of meanings that actively construct our society and culture by bringing objects, subjects and knowledge into being. From this social constructionist perspective, discourse analysis in this study is concerned with identifying the multiple ways ECEC is constructed and constituted within various discourses and the power relations these constructs enact.³

The particular approach to discourse analysis which I take is influenced by a number of discourse theorists. Although the combining of theories may be seen as problematic in some areas of study, from a social constructionist position diversity in perspective taking when analysing discourse is viewed positively. For instance, Jørgensen and Phillips say: “*Multiperspectival* work is not only permissible but positively valued in most forms of discourses analysis. The view is that different perspectives provide different forms of knowledge about a phenomenon so that, together, they produce a broader understanding”.⁴ So, by combining a number of perspectives, it becomes possible to open up new ways of examining constructs of ECEC that may throw new light on these constructs.

¹ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

² P. Fuery, ‘Representation, discourses and desires — contemporary Australian culture and critical theory’, in P. Fuery (ed.), *Representation, Discourse and Desire: Contemporary Australian Culture and Critical Theory* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1994), 1 – 7.

³ J. Potter, *Representing Reality* (London: Sage, 1996).

⁴ M. Jørgensen, & L. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (London: Sage, 2002), p.4 [emphasis in the original].

The caveat to this multiperspectival position, though, is that the discourse analysis forms a complete ‘package’.⁵ That is, the epistemological, philosophical and methodological issues must be coherent, and their pertinence to the topic under study must be clearly relevant. As such, it is necessary to clearly set out the particular view of discourses analysis I take.

Unmasking the Naturalness of Constructs

Discourse analysis is a method for identifying constructs and the discourses within which those constructs are constituted.⁶ In so doing, discourse analysis is useful for challenging the ‘naturalness’ of constructs. As Jørgensen and Phillips say: “An important discourse analytical aim is to unmask and delineate taken-for-granted, common-sense understandings, transforming them into potential objects for discussion and criticism and, thus, open to change”.⁷ In this study, discourse analysis is used to reveal the multiple constructs of ECEC and the discourses which gave rise to these, both in the past and the present, so that these might be opened to critique.

Making Visible the Power that Underlies Constructs

An important aspect of discourse analysis is to make visible the power that underlies constructs. In particular, from a social justice orientation, the purpose of discourse analysis is to “criticise unjust social conditions and contribute to improvement of those conditions”.⁸ This is not to suggest that this critique is a means of revealing hidden truths so that subjects can ‘see again’. Such a position might be suggested from a Marxist position that aims to reveal the ideological mask that prevents subjects from

⁵ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*.

⁶ C. Willig (ed.), *Applied Discourse Analysis: Social and Psychological Interventions* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999).

⁷ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, p.178.

⁸ *ibid*, p.179.

seeing their true position.⁹ But this idea is untenable from a social constructionist position which considers that there is no 'truth' to be revealed. In this study, my purpose is to reveal multiple constructs of ECEC, and to identify the subject positions these constructs produce and how power operates through them. In so doing, it is possible to discuss the constructs in relation to one another in order to highlight how some are more just than others.

Identifying Positions of Resistance

A social constructionist discourse analysis also enables us to identify positions of resistance. In this way, discourse analysis can be seen as empowerment and "is concerned with the identification of counter-discourses".¹⁰ That is, it aims not merely to identify the dominant discourses and practices but also to actively intervene by identifying, exploring and promoting alternative subversive and often silenced discursive practices. Willig refers to these alternative discourses as "spaces for resistance".¹¹ In this examination of ECEC I aim to identify constructs that perhaps have been hidden or overlooked.

Recognising the Dynamic Nature of Constructs

Lastly, social constructionist discourse analysis is valuable for this study because it recognises the dynamic nature of constructs. Constructs are open to change because the discourses within which they are constituted are fluid and constantly shifting.¹² This fluidity creates the possibility for creating alternative meanings.¹³ Laclau puts it thus:

⁹ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, p.178.

¹⁰ Willig, *Applied Discourse Analysis*, p.12.

¹¹ *ibid*, p.12.

¹² G. Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (2nd ed.), (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹³ J. P. Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Inasmuch as argument and discourse constitute the social, their open-ended character becomes the source of a greater activism and a more rational libertarianism. Humankind, having always bowed to external forces — God, Nature, the necessary laws of History — can now, at the threshold of postmodernity, consider itself for the first time the creator and constructor of its own history.¹⁴

Accordingly, we can use discourse analysis, not merely to describe, but also to bring about change.¹⁵

From a social justice orientation, then, social constructionist discourse analysis holds promise for educationalists. Not only can discourse analysis ‘shatter’ previously held inequitable truth claims, but it is also an optimistic approach that may be able to offer alternative positionings and new meanings and generate new possibilities for a more socially just ECEC.¹⁶ But where do we look in order to identify discourses? Below I outline the ‘objects’ of discourse analysis.

Objects of the Analysis

There are no recipes for discourse analysis, although it involves first and foremost the careful reading of texts.¹⁷ Discourses are manifest in anything that can be read for meaning, including written texts (speeches, letters, novels, newspaper articles and so on), visual images, fashion and architecture. In this way, most of what is considered human activity can be ‘read’ for meaning or are ‘textual’.¹⁸ According to Parker: “Texts are delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in *any* form that can be given an

¹⁴ E. Laclau, ‘Politics and the limits of modernity’, in T. Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 329–343, p.341.

¹⁵ I. Parker, *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p.21.

¹⁶ E. Burman, ‘Differing with Deconstruction: A Feminist Critique’, in I. Parker, & J. Shotter (eds.), *Deconstructing Social Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1990), 208–220.

¹⁷ Parker, *Discourse Dynamics*.

¹⁸ V. Burr, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (London: Routledge, 1995).

interpretative gloss".¹⁹ For a social constructionist analysis of discourse, then, the object of analysis is *text*.²⁰ In this study, written texts were the sources for analysis and I describe these further on in the chapter.

I do not claim that my examination of the texts reveals the truth of ECEC; rather it aims to provide examples of multiple meanings. Furthermore, I acknowledge that any discourse analysis requires a degree of reflexivity and must always be considered interpretive and tentative.²¹ As such, I recognise that my own perspectives, understandings and abilities influenced the analysis and interpretation.²² But the study does provide an additional 'reading' of ECEC and thus contributes to the existing literature that has critically examined the discursive nature of ECEC discussed below.

Previous Studies Utilising Discourse Analysis to Examine ECEC

Here I look at some of the studies undertaken previously in the field of ECEC, and explain similarities and differences between these studies and my own.

Lero discusses and problematises four dominant 'discourses' which she attributes to Moss.²³ The first discourse, '*Childcare for Working Parents*', constructs ECEC as substitute mother care. Lero contends this construct upholds the notion of ECEC as a commodity, as issues of supply, reliability and cost are considered important. As will be

¹⁹ Parker, *Discourse*, p.6 [emphasis in the original].

²⁰ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, p.35.

²¹ R. Wodak, *Disorders of Discourse* (London: Longman, 1996).

²² Willig, *Applied Discourse Analysis*.

²³ After extensive searching I have been unable to find the original Moss source to which Lero refers. D. S. Lero, 'Early childhood education: An empowering force for the twenty-first century?', in J. Hayden (ed.), *Landscapes in Early Childhood Education: Cross-National Perspectives on Empowerment – a Guide for the New Millennium* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 445 – 457. Lero cites: P. Moss, 'Early childhood services in Europe', *Policy Options*. 18 (1) (1997), 27 – 30.

discussed more fully in the Chapter Four, the construct of '*Childcare for Working Parents*' has a long history, thus making it resistant to change.²⁴

The second of Moss's discourses identified by Lero is '*Services for Children in Need*'. Here, ECEC is described as a service for disadvantaged children. Lero, similarly to Moss, Dillon and Statham, argues that constructions of ECEC based on the construct of 'children in need' tend to impose deficit models of ECEC.²⁵

Moss's third discourse Lero identifies is '*Nursery Education for Over Threes*', which focuses on the educational and developmental benefits of early education for children aged three to six years. According to Lero, this discourse tends to advocate pre-school services that operate only during school hours and thus fail to meet the needs of working parents. Also, this discourse fragments the early childhood period into two distinct age groups, which Lero contends could be disadvantageous for the younger children.

The last discourse Lero attributes to Moss is '*Multifunctional Resources*'. This discourse constructs ECEC as services for children aged birth to six years that serve multiple functions. Lero contends this last discourse upholds Moss's idea that ECEC services should be seen as communities for learning that incorporate the multiple needs

²⁴ D. Brennan, 'Child care and Australian social policy', in J. Bowes (ed.), *Children, Families and Communities: Contexts and Consequences* (2nd ed.) (Sydney: Oxford University Press, 2004), 210 – 227; S. B. Kamerman, 'Early childhood education and care: An overview of developments in the OECD countries', *International Journal of Education Research*. 33 (2000), 7 – 29; M. Vandenbroek, 'From crèches to childcare: Constructions of motherhood and inclusion/exclusion in the history of Belgium infant care', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 4 (2) (2003), 137 – 148, p.145.

²⁵ P. Moss, J. Dillon, & J. Statham, 'The 'child in need' and the 'rich child': Discourses, constructions and practices', *Critical Social Policy*. 20 (2) (2000), 233 – 254.

of children and families.²⁶ Lero advocates this discourse arguing that it “recognizes the importance of early childhood services that meet employment and social welfare goals, but extend beyond them to meet multiple purposes for a variety of families, serving collective as well as individual ends”.²⁷

Lero’s discussion of Moss’s work is useful because it highlights multiple constructs of ECEC. However, there is no textual evidence provided for the discourses she describes. As such, it is difficult to determine how the discourses are evident in the texts constructing ECEC. It is my intention, in the current study, to demonstrate clearly how ECEC is constructed within texts.

In contrast, Duncan is concerned with making visible the ways ECEC is constructed in texts.²⁸ Duncan examines texts surrounding teachers’ employment negotiations in New Zealand, and clearly identifies two dominant discourses within these texts. These discourses are ‘*For the Sake of the Children*’ where the teacher works selflessly for the sake of the children, and ‘*Children First*’ where children’s needs are placed above those of the teacher. Duncan’s work shows how these discourses serve to marginalise and subjugate teachers.

Both Moss’s and Duncan’s identification of multiple discourses of ECEC are useful because they expand the discussion beyond the problematisation of ‘scientific’ ECEC, previously highlighted as typical of much of the deconstructionist literature. However,

²⁶ C. Thelander, ‘Early childhood education policy and 2010: Critical perspectives’, in B. H. Knight, & L. Rowan (eds.), *Researching Contemporary Educational Environments* (Flaxton, Queensland: Post Pressed, 2001), 149 – 167.

²⁷ Lero, ‘Early childhood education’, p.451.

²⁸ J. Duncan, ‘“For the sake of the children” as the worth of teacher? The gendered discourses of the New Zealand national kindergarten teachers’ employment negotiations’, *Gender and Education*, 8 (2) (1996), 159 – 170.

their concept of 'discourse' seems to differ from mine. Both Moss's and Duncan's discourses of ECEC seem to be what I refer to as *constructs* of ECEC. That is, they are examples of different meanings of ECEC. For instance, Moss's discourse *Child Care for Working Parents* seems rather to be a construct of ECEC as 'work related care', and Duncan's discourse *For the Sake of the Children* is a construct of ECEC as 'beneficial for children'. The broader discourses that gave rise to these constructs are not examined.

I agree that identifying constructs of ECEC is important; indeed it is a major aim of this study. However, I see this as only a first step in the analysis. My conception of discourse leads to a different focus. I contend that for a thorough understanding of ECEC constructs, analysis must also identify the wider discourses from within which these constructs emerged. For instance, unlike Duncan, I am concerned with identifying the discourses which gave rise to and upheld the construct of ECEC as *For the sake of the children*.

More in keeping with my understanding of discourse is Moss's later work with Petrie, and Thelander's work. Moss and Petrie undertake a discourse analysis of United Kingdom policy documents.²⁹ They identify that children were typically constructed within these documents as 'needy'. Also, they find that the concept of 'care' is accepted without scrutiny in the documents, suggesting that the term care is naturally understood. They argue that such concepts need to be more fully interrogated. This has been a fruitful line of inquiry, and Moss goes on to investigate the concept of care more fully

²⁹ P. Moss, & P. Petrie, *From Children's Services to Children's Spaces: Public Policy, Children and Childhood* (London: Routledge / Falmer, 2002). See also: P. Moss, & J. Brannen, 'Concepts relationships and policies' in J. Brannen, & P. Moss (eds.), *Rethinking Children's Care* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 1 – 22; Thelander, 'Early childhood education policy and 2010'.

in a later publication.³⁰ Important here is that Moss and Petrie recognise that ECEC is constructed within a broad, socio-political discursive field. In particular, they identify the neo-liberal discourses of modernity.³¹ Their analysis is limited to this one discourse; they do not claim to offer a comprehensive analysis of the ways ECEC is constructed within the wider discursive field.

In a similar way to Moss and Petrie, Thelander critically analyses Queensland public education policy documents. She identifies how, within these documents, the dominant discourses of 'economics' and 'universality' serve to construct ECEC in particular ways. Thelander shows, for instance, how economic discourses are used throughout the documents to construct education in terms of economic goals of "efficiency and effectiveness or outcomes measures".³² She argues that such a focus might jeopardise or "dilute social justice concerns".³³ The work of Thelander and Moss and Petrie is particularly valuable for highlighting how examination of texts can make evident the ways education is constructed within the dominant wider socio-political discourses as well as revealing the subject positions these discourses produce.

However, as discussed in Chapter One, discourses operate to obscure our view, and it may well be that there are other constructs of ECEC that have not, as yet, been identified. I argued also, that an historical approach can create a necessary distance to facilitate this identification. The work of Pacini-Ketchabaw, referred to briefly in

³⁰ P. Moss, 'Getting beyond childcare: Reflections on recent policy and future possibilities', in J. Brannen, & P. Moss (eds.), *Rethinking Children's Care* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 25 – 41.

³¹ I discuss neo-liberal discourses more fully in the following chapter.

³² Thelander, 'Early childhood education policy and 2010, p.152.

³³ *ibid*, p.152.

Chapter One, provides an important example of how historical discourse analysis can provide valuable insights.³⁴

Pacini-Ketchabaw argues for the importance of critically examining texts that govern childcare. In particular, she examines the historical constitution in 1946 of a document that regulates childcare in Canada — the Day Nurseries Act (DNA) — with the explicit aim of using these historical understandings to shed light on contemporary ECEC in Canada. Of particular significance here is that Pacini-Ketchabaw extends her examination to the social conditions within which the document was constituted to identify “the discourses that allowed the enactment of the first version of the DNA”.³⁵ She identifies three “primary discourses” which have been “authorized and legitimized within the DNA” since its constitution.³⁶ These are:

... discourses related to the need for medical supervision of children attending childcare centres, discourses emphasizing the relationship between childcare and ‘families in need’, as well as discourses that promote the need to follow strict programming and behavioural guidelines in childcare programs.³⁷

Pacini-Ketchabaw problematises these discourses, using Foucaultian notions, and highlights how they continue to serve to uphold “social relations of power and knowledge”.³⁸ Of particular salience for my study is that Pacini-Ketchabaw’s work illustrates how historical discourse analysis is valuable for deepening our understanding of why contemporary ECEC is constructed in the ways it is today.

Similarly to Pacini-Ketchabaw, I examine the constitution of ECEC in NSW during the period 1893 — 1915, with the intention of using these understandings to reflect on

³⁴ V. Pacini-Ketchabaw, ‘The meanings embedded within childcare regulations: A historical analysis’, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 6 (1) (2005), 41 – 53.

³⁵ *ibid*, p.42.

³⁶ *ibid*, p.43 & p.48.

³⁷ *ibid*, pp.49 – 50.

³⁸ *ibid*, p.50.

contemporary constructs of ECEC. However, my analysis is broader in scope than Pacini-Ketchabaw as it involves the examination of multiple texts.

The Current Study

History of the present begins with an interpretation of the contemporary condition.³⁹ I therefore began my examination by analysing the ways ECEC was constructed in contemporary texts. However, my focus is primarily on the historical, and the greater part of my analysis examines the way ECEC was constructed in historical texts. As will be shown below, although there are similarities between the contemporary and historical data sources used and my methods of analysis, the historical data was more diverse and broader in scope than the contemporary data; and my analysis of the historical data involved an additional step to that of the contemporary data.

It is important to note, also, that my collection and analysis of contemporary data occurred concurrently with my analysis of the historical. It must therefore be acknowledged that my identification of similar constructs in the past and present is likely to have been influenced by my engagement with the historical material. I do not regard this as problematic, however, as this is exactly how historicising the present operates to inform contemporary analysis. Below, I outline and provide a rationale for the data sources used for this analysis. I go on to outline the method of analysis I used for identifying initially contemporary, and then historical, constructs of ECEC.

³⁹ H. L. Dreyfus, & P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (2nd edition with an afterword by and an interview with Michel Foucault) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

Method

Data Sources

As previously stated, constructs are made evident through texts.⁴⁰ Therefore, I drew my data from contemporary and historical texts and I describe these below (see Appendix 5 for a table summarising data sources). For ease of comparison between the contemporary and historical texts, I have classified them into three groups: (i) public; (ii) professional; and (iii) Government. These categories are merely devices for organisation and I recognise that the boundaries between the texts are somewhat blurred.

Public Texts

The first type of texts I examined were those meant for a public audience and broadly accessible in the public domain. One contemporary public text and a diverse range of historical public texts were examined.

Contemporary Public Text

I examined every edition of *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper from May 2002 until December 2005 for reportage on ECEC, an estimated 1104 editions.⁴¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald* was chosen for several reasons. It is a quality broadsheet newspaper that carries diverse and often opposing viewpoints and has a large circulation. As such, it is a highly significant text informing public opinion in the NSW context. It has also been in continuous production since 1831 and so offered a continuity between the two periods examined.⁴²

⁴⁰ Willig, *Applied Discourse Analysis*.

⁴¹ 184 (weeks) x 6 (weekly editions) = 1104.

⁴² The Fairfax publications website estimates a circulation of 210 600. Accessed on 28 June, 2005 from: <http://heraldadcentre.fairfax.com.au/adcentre/newspapers/smh/audcirc.html>.

Every edition of *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper from 1893 — 1915 was examined (an estimated 5616 editions).⁴³ *The Sydney Morning Herald* was chosen because it had a large circulation at that time. The ways in which ECEC was constructed within this daily newspaper were no doubt highly influential in informing the public about the meaning of Free Kindergartens and Day Nurseries.

As well, all editions of *The Bulletin* from 1893 - 1900 were examined (an estimated 364 editions).⁴⁴ My examination was limited to this period because I needed to limit the scope of the study. *The Bulletin*, being a rather irreverent weekly newspaper, offered a contrasting approach to reporting than that of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *The Bulletin's* often laconic reportage, and particularly its illustrations which were designed to quickly and easily convey meanings, provided a useful means for getting a sense of the issues of concern in the period.⁴⁵ As such, *The Bulletin* was particularly useful for identifying the wider discursive environment.

Newspapers at the turn of the nineteenth century were a particularly significant form of communication, and provide the historian with valuable insights into the major discussions of their day.⁴⁶ According to Petersen, they are legitimate sources of data for historical research. Petersen contends that: "Before radio and television became widespread, newspapers were the main conveyors of information and the main source

⁴³ 18 (years) x 52 (weeks) x 6 (daily editions) = 5616.

⁴⁴ 7 (years 1893-1900) x 52 (weekly editions) = 364.

⁴⁵ A. Nóvoa, 'Texts, images, and memories', in T. S. Popkewitz, M. A. Pereyra, & B. M. Franklin (eds.), *Cultural History and Education: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 45 – 66.

⁴⁶ D. Matheson, 'The birth of news discourse: Changes in news language in British newspapers, 1880 – 1930', *Media, Culture and Society*. 22 (5) (2000), 557 – 573.

of general education and entertainment for most people”.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Petersen refers to newspapers as “solid productions, meant to be carefully perused and kept as a record of events”.⁴⁸ The construction of ECEC in the historical media was an important source because these texts revealed what it was possible to say about ECEC and thereby reflected what ECEC was considered to ‘be’, at least in those documents.

Newspapers at the turn of the twentieth century differed from those of today. In particular, they tended not to editorialise and there was little interpretation of events. For instance, speeches were reported verbatim and letters from correspondents and public officials were presented with little framing.⁴⁹ Consequently, newspapers at the turn of the twentieth century were perhaps more reflective of the general language used than are today’s newspapers. Although of course, in either period, material included for publication would have been selected according to the newspaper’s criteria, so they can never be a ‘true’ reflection of the social context.

Other historical public texts I examined for this study included books relating to childcare, fictional literature, and women’s magazines. In particular, every extant edition of *The Dawn* women’s magazine from 1888 - 1904, held in the NSW State Library, was examined. This magazine, established and edited for many years by Louisa Lawson (suffragist and mother of poet Henry Lawson) claimed to be: “The Australian Women’s journal and mouthpiece”.⁵⁰ Initially, this magazine was a highly political text that lobbied for the Divorce Extension Bill and Women’s Suffrage, and advocated women’s further education. It also raised many issues relating to children, such as ‘child

⁴⁷ R. C. Petersen, *History of Education Research: What it is and How to do it* (Sydney: NTU, 1992), p.68.

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p.68.

⁴⁹ *ibid*.

⁵⁰ *The Dawn*, 15 May, 1888.

farming' and children's education, which were considered to be women's concerns.⁵¹ As the years passed, *The Dawn's* political edge seems to have dulled, however, and greater attention was paid to matters such as practical household management, for instance, cooking, needlecraft, budgeting and cleaning. It also gave advice on nursing, medical matters and beauty tips. From its inception the paper included poetry and fiction writing. Interestingly, it also had a 'children's page' with amusements such as puzzles and games.

Professional Texts

The second type of texts I examined, which I have categorised as 'professional texts', were either aimed primarily at a professional educationalist audience or written by professional educators for a public audience.

Contemporary Professional Texts

I examined *The NSW Curriculum Framework*, a document provided to all NSW licensed children's services by the NSW Department of Community Services.⁵² It is intended to form the foundations upon which the daily experiences of children, their families and the professionals who work with them in children's services are built. As such, this document provides a valuable insight into what are currently promoted as 'best practices' in ECEC in NSW. Texts circulated by Early Childhood Australia (ECA) were also examined, including the organisation's newsletters and its journal — *Every Child* — specifically targeted at early childhood practitioners. ECA is a peak body in ECEC in Australia today. Its publications are widely circulated to its members and

⁵¹ *The Dawn*, 15 May, 1888.

⁵² Office of Childcare, *The NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services: The Practice of Relationships: Essential Provisions for Children's Services* (Sydney: NSW Department of Community Services, 2002).

provide an insight into the way ECEC is constructed within the profession. Because of the need to limit the scope of the contemporary analysis, some important professional documents that were not examined were The National Quality Improvement and Accreditation System documents and the NSW Children's Services Regulation.⁵³

Historical Professional Texts

A wide selection of historical professional texts were examined including educational, medical and scientific documents.⁵⁴ In particular, all extant copies from 1890 – 1915 of several professional journals relating to education and ECEC, held by the State Library of NSW were examined, including — *The Australian Teacher*, *The Australian Journal of Education* and *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*, as were a number of historically contemporaneous texts explaining 'the Kindergarten method' of teaching.

My examination focused particularly heavily on the archival sources of New South Wales Kindergarten Union and Sydney Day Nursery Association.⁵⁵ These documents included annual reports, pamphlets and brochures, and personal correspondence. As I did not examine the contemporary documents of these associations, this does mark a significant difference between the historical and contemporary sources. I made this decision because in the historical context, the Kindergarten Union of NSW and the

⁵³ National Childcare Accreditation Council, *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Handbook* (3rd ed). Accessed on 25 September 2005, from:

http://www.ncac.gov.au/qias_publications/new_qias_publications.htm#Handbook; Department of Family and Community Services, Children's Services Regulation, 2004. Accessed on 25 September, 2005, from: http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/comm_partners/childrens_regs.htm.

⁵⁴ All these texts were held in the archives of the State Library of New South Wales, Mitchell Wing.

⁵⁵ Kind permission to access the Kindergarten Union of NSW archive, held in the Mitchell Wing of The State Library of New South Wales, was granted by KU Children's Services. Unfortunately, access to the Sydney Day Nursery Association archives was not possible, due to major constructions being undertaken (see Appendix 4) As such, my analysis of material related to Sydney Day Nursery was limited to the documents available at the State library as well as those held in the archives of the Institute of Early Childhood collection at Macquarie University.

Sydney Day Nursery Association were the primary providers of ECEC and examination of their historical materials gave an important insight into the ways ECEC was actively constructed at that time. Today, however, there are many providers of ECEC, and my aim was to examine the ways ECEC was constructed broadly, not just within these two organisations.

Government Texts

The third type of texts I examined were those produced by, or for, NSW Government and the Australian Government, as well as documents that have influenced their policies in relation to children and ECEC.

Contemporary Government Texts

Because ECEC in NSW today comes under the jurisdiction of both state and federal government, I examined a range of NSW and Australian Government texts. The NSW Government texts included the websites of the Department of Community Services (the State Government department responsible for licensing ECEC in NSW), and *Families First* (a State Government initiative focusing on the early childhood period).⁵⁶ Australian Government texts included the websites of the Family and Community Services Department (the Department responsible for childcare) and *The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* (an Australian Government initiative focusing on early childhood).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ <http://www.familiesfirst.nsw.gov.au>.

⁵⁷ <http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/sfsc-sfcs.htm>.

Also at a national level, *The National Agenda for Early Childhood* was examined.⁵⁸ This document aims to set a 'road map' for future directions for a number of services for children including ECEC. As well, two documents influential in informing *The National Agenda* were examined, namely *Pathways to Prevention*⁵⁹ (from the Commonwealth's National Crime Prevention), and the *Organisation for Economic and Community Development (OECD) Australian Background Report*⁶⁰ (an Australian Government commissioned report to the OECD on ECEC in Australia).

Finally, the websites of two international organisations, The World Bank and The OECD were examined.⁶¹ 'Early childhood' has been an area of recent interest for both the World Bank and the OECD. Similarly to the OECD, the World Bank appears to have been highly influential in the development of the Australian National Agenda for Early Childhood.

Historical Government Texts

The NSW Parliamentary Debates were examined from 1893 — 1896, a period when the provision of education for young children was being debated in the House. Also examined were the *Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birthrate and on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales*, and a number of annual reports from *The State Children's Relief Board Reports*. These documents gave an insight into the ways that

⁵⁸ Department of Family and Community Services, *The National Agenda for Early Childhood: A Draft Framework* (ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004). Accessed on 27 May, 2005, from: http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/family/early_childhood.htm.

⁵⁹ National Crime Prevention, *Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and Early Intervention Approaches to Crime in Australia. Full report* (Canberra: National Crime Prevention, Attorney-General's Department, 1999).

⁶⁰ F. Press, & A. Hayes, *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: Australian Background Report* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000).

⁶¹ <http://www.oecd.org>; <http://www.worldbank.org>.

children and women were constructed and provided examples of the ways services for children were viewed.

Some Considerations in Relation to Historical Sources

The identification and examination of historical sources were often guided by references to them in other texts. Material from both the archives and the print media provided avenues for further searches. Also, the Parliamentary Newspaper Index was used to identify newspaper articles referring to ECEC, other than those in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from 1908, when the Index was first established, until 1915.

As previously discussed, historical data is influenced by what is available, who wrote it, printed it and made it available. Whilst the texts examined in this study do not represent the 'truth' of ECEC, it is possible to identify the multiple ways ECEC was constructed within these texts. They give an insight into what ECEC meant and what could be considered ECEC. Looking through my contemporary eyes this can only ever be an interpretation. However, being enmeshed in the data and language of the time informed my interpretation enabling me to offer a plausible reading of the meaning.⁶² Below, I outline how I analysed the data.

Data analysis

Data analysis involved three sequential processes: (i) identifying constructs; (ii) identifying power and (iii) identifying discourses. I discuss each briefly in turn.

⁶² A. Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997).

Identifying Constructs

Both contemporary and historical data were examined to identify multiple constructions of ECEC. I read the documents and highlighted all references to ECEC within. I then selected and transcribed those phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs that seemed to capture particularly well the diverse views of ECEC (see Appendix 6 for an example of this early stage of data analysis). Next to these transcriptions, I wrote my initial responses, my interpretations of the ways they constructed ECEC (for example, as enabling women to access work, or as a means of saving children), as well as any questions they raised for me. This tentative coding was frequently modified as new data provided deeper insights.

The next stage of the analysis involved “exploring patterns in and across the statements”.⁶³ Each coded transcript was placed on a separate piece of paper. I immersed myself in the data, reading and re-reading the transcripts, looking for patterns and connections across the data, sorting and categorising them into common groups. Through this intuitive, interactive and iterative process, I began to recognise a number of recurring themes emerging (see Appendix 7 for an example of this beginning coding and development of categories). These themes eventually became the six dominant constructs of ECEC I discuss in the following chapters. The aim was to identify multiple ways ECEC was articulated in the texts. As such, when selecting which representations to include in my discussion, my aim was to provide examples that illustrated the diverse ways ECEC was constructed; it was not meant to be a quantitatively representative sample.

⁶³ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, p.21.

Identifying Power

Secondly, I aimed to identify the ways power operated through both the contemporary and historical constructs. This analysis involved critical reflection to identify “the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality”.⁶⁴ For instance, I asked what were the consequences of these constructions? And, how did power operate to construct particular subject positions? For the contemporary constructs, my analysis drew on existing deconstructionist literature which has problematised ECEC, referred to in Chapter One. Likewise, my analysis of the historical constructions was informed by previous histories of ECEC, as well as the deconstructionist literature. My discussion of the constructs in the following chapters includes a critique of these previous problematisations.

Identifying Discourses

The third and final analytical process was to investigate the macro contexts within which ECEC was constructed. As previously argued, discursive power operates to obscure the discursive nature of constructs. As such, my analysis focused on identifying the discourses within which the historical constructs emerged. I anticipated that these understandings would shed light on contemporary constructs.

Historical constructs of ECEC were interrogated to determine the conditions within which these formations arose, existed and functioned.⁶⁵ Texts referring to the broader social context, such as *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Bulletin*, were examined in order to identify the social discourses of the time, or the discursive field within which these constructions of ECEC emerged (see Appendix 8 for an example of the early

⁶⁴ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Discourse Analysis*, p.21.

⁶⁵ Dreyfus & Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*.

stages of development of these broad discourses). Did the different discourses construct ECEC in different ways? Were particular articulations objectified across discourses? Were certain constructs of ECEC upheld by several discourses? This analysis was further informed by previous historical studies of ECEC.

As discussed in the following chapters, analysis of the data revealed six key constructs of ECEC evident in both the contemporary and historical texts. These constructs were ECEC as: (i) separate education; (ii) progressive education; (iii) scientific education and care; (iv) socially just education; (v) national work; and (vi) women's work. Importantly, these six constructs are not mutually exclusive discrete entities. The boundaries between them are fluid and they tend to merge, overlap and support one another.

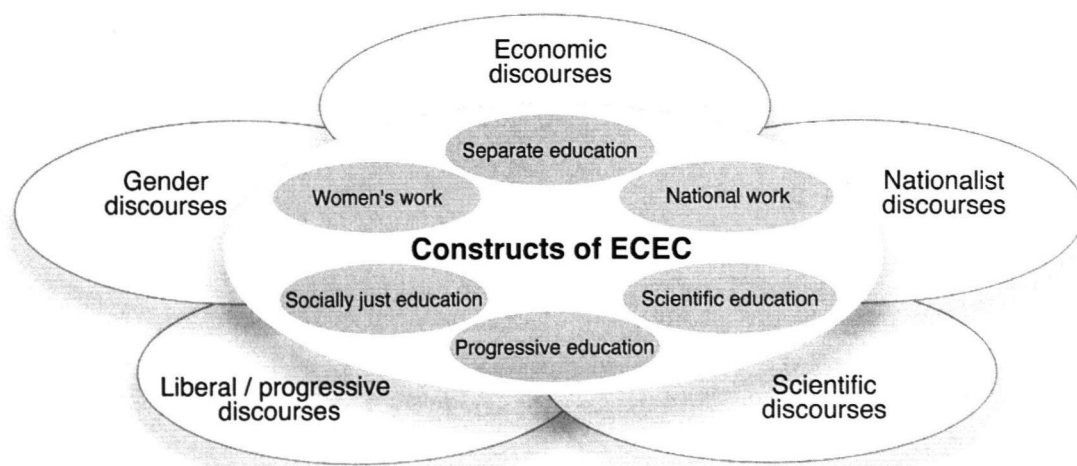


Figure 3: Diagrammatic representation of the constructs of ECEC identified and the discursive fields within which they emerged.

As is illustrated in Figure 3, examination of the historical context revealed that the multiple constructions of ECEC in NSW emerged from within a field of discourses

namely — *liberal / progressive, scientific, economic, nationalist, and gender* discourses. I revisit this figure in each of the chapters examining historical constructs.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

In this chapter, by outlining tenets of social constructionist discourses analysis, and referring to literature that has previously used discourse analysis to examine ECEC, I sought to justify my use of historical, social constructionist discourse analysis. I also established my method of analysis. The following eight chapters discuss the constructs that this analysis revealed. Chapters Three and Four each deal with contemporary constructs and Chapters Five to Ten the historical constructs.