

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEMPORARY CONSTRUCTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

AND CARE: A CRITICAL REVIEW

PART ONE

In Chapter One, I stated that histories of the present begin with an explanation of the contemporary situation. The purpose of this and the following chapter is to report my findings from the analysis of the contemporary texts discussed in Chapter Two. My aims in this and the next chapters are to: (i) outline the six constructs of ECEC I have identified within the texts examined for this study; (ii) critique and problematise these constructs, drawing on deconstructionist literature; (iii) critique the problematisations; and (iv) raise questions about how these constructs emerged. Because of the lengthy nature of this discussion, I have divided the findings into two chapters. Chapter Three is concerned with ECEC as: (i) separate education; (ii) progressive education; and (iii) scientific education and care, while Chapter Four focuses on ECEC as: (iv) socially just education; (v) national work; and (vi) women's work. Although separate, the two chapters form a whole.

Construct One: ECEC as Separate Education

As mentioned in the Introduction, examination of the contemporary texts reveals a tension in the construction of ECEC in NSW. As will be shown below, 'early childhood' is constructed as being the period in the lifespan from birth to eight years. In NSW, however, the provision of educational services for children in this age range is split into two distinct constructs — school-based ECEC and prior-to-school ECEC. Below I discuss this separation and highlight how it may be problematic for children, their families and the early childhood profession.

Early Childhood: Birth to Eight Years

Currently, the early childhood period is typically viewed, both in Australia and internationally, as birth to age eight years.¹ In recent times in Australia there has been a focus on this early childhood period.² For instance, in part as a response to its commitment to the UNICEF document '*A World Fit for Children*', the Australian Government initiated a consultation process that aimed to identify the most effective early childhood intervention strategies, in order to develop a National Agenda for Early Childhood in Australia.³ Moreover, each Australian state and a territory government has developed its own early childhood policy or framework.

In particular, the NSW Government's prevention and early intervention initiative, *Families First*, incorporates a range of community, health and educational services geared towards:

... connecting parents to each other for support and building communities and services that support families with children aged birth to eight years.⁴

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care* (OECD) Accessed on 5 September, 2003, from: <http://www.oecd.org>

² 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; C. Thelander, 'Early childhood education policy and 2010: Critical perspectives', in B. H. Knight, & L. Rowan (eds.), *Researching Contemporary Educational Environments* (Laxton, Queensland: Post Pressed, 2001), 149 – 167.

³ Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing, *Consultation Paper: Towards the Development of a National Agenda for Early Childhood* (ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). Accessed on 27 May, 2005, from: <http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/minister2.nsf/content/earlychildhood.htm>. The National Agenda is an Australian Commonwealth Government initiative and is described on the Department of Family and Community Services website as "a road-map for the development of national approaches to early intervention and prevention". '*A world fit for children*' is a UNICEF document that commits those countries which signed the declaration to complete "the unfinished agenda of the 1990 World Summit for Children, and to achieving other goals and objectives, in particular those of the UN Millennium Declaration. It reaffirms leaders' obligation to promote and protect the rights of each child, acknowledging the legal standards set by the Convention on The Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols". Accessed on 25 June, 2005 from: <http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/wffc/>.

⁴ www.familiesfirst.nsw.gov.au.

As such, the concept of 'early childhood' as birth to eight years is widely understood and accepted in NSW.

Early Childhood Education and Care: Birth to Eight Years

If early childhood is considered to be the first eight years of life, then it follows that services that educate children during this period, be considered early childhood education. Indeed, Bredekamp and Copple state, in *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, a text developed in the United States but highly influential in informing ECEC in NSW, that an early childhood setting is "any group program in a center, school, or other facility that serves children from birth through age 8".⁵ The construct of early childhood education spanning this age range is also upheld by many practices in NSW. For instance, educators stress the importance of what might be termed early childhood principles, such as play-based learning, for children aged up to eight years.⁶ In particular, play is considered by the NSW Board of Studies to be "central to children's learning" in the early stages of school.⁷ Furthermore, most early childhood teacher education programs in NSW prepare future teachers to work with children aged birth to eight years.⁸ But despite this suggested continuity across the first eight years, and the aforementioned focus on early childhood, there is a separation in the provision of education services for children during this period.

⁵ S. Bredekamp, & C. Copple, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* (rev ed) (Washington, D. C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1997).

⁶ See for instance F. Briggs, & G. Potter, *Teaching Children in the First Three Years of School* (2nd ed.) (Melbourne: Longman, 1995); S. Dockett, & B. Perry (eds.), *Beginning School Together: Sharing Strengths* (Canberra: Australian Early Childhood Association, 2001); F. Press, & A. Hayes, *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: Australian Background Report* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000).

⁷ New South Wales Board of Studies, K-6 English Syllabus, 1998. Accessed on 28 May, 2003, from: [www.http://k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/english/english_index.html](http://k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/english/english_index.html).

⁸ Press & Hayes, *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*.

Two Distinct Constructs of ECEC

Education for children aged six to fifteen years is compulsory in NSW and ensuring universal access is the responsibility of the State Government.⁹ In addition, the State provides one year of pre-compulsory, school-based education, referred to as kindergarten, which most children in NSW attend.¹⁰ Children as young as four and half years can attend kindergarten. For younger children, however, there is no universal provision of education.

As highlighted in the Introduction, a fragmented system of services has developed in NSW over the years to care for and educate children considered too young to attend school, incorporating a diverse array of predominantly fee charging services such as long-day care, preschools, family day care and occasional care.¹¹ These educational and care settings provide 'spaces' for young children, with specialised equipment, teachers and staff, and legislative requirements and funding arrangements that differ from those for older children in school-based settings.¹²

Because they come under a range of funding bodies and jurisdictions, it is difficult to get an accurate measure of the percentage of children who access prior-to-school services in NSW.¹³ It is known, however, that children's access to prior-to-school settings is influenced by factors such as availability and affordability of services.¹⁴ As

⁹ Press & Hayes, *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*; P. Moss, & P. Petrie, *From Children's Services to Children's Spaces: Public Policy, Children and Childhood* (London: Routledge / Falmer, 2002).

¹³ The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Child Care Survey found that in 2002 59% of 4 year olds attended pre-school and 25% used long day. Accessed on 14 July, 2005 from: <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/52377CDB7D3AE3FDCA256BD000284E84?Open>.

¹⁴ Press & Hayes, *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*.

such, there is inequity in access to prior-to-school settings. So, although ECEC might be constructed as education for children aged birth to eight years, a separation clearly exists between prior-to-school ECEC and school-based ECEC.

My concern in this thesis is with prior-to-school education and care. This is not to deny the importance of early childhood principles in school, but rather an acknowledgement that education and care in prior-to-school settings differs substantially from that in school, not least in terms of funding, accessibility and availability. However, the separation of ECEC from later education is problematic as I discuss below.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Separate Education

In the discussion that follows, I draw on deconstructionist literature to problematise the construct of ECEC as separate education. In particular, I challenge the assumptions that underlay the separation of ECEC from later education and argue that this separation may marginalise ECEC. I also contend that the separation of ECEC, which requires children to cross educational boundaries from ECEC to later schooling, may be disadvantageous for certain children and their families. Finally, I highlight how the separation of ECEC may contribute to ECEC being viewed as preparation for later schooling, and why this might be problematic for the profession.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Separate Education: Challenging the Assumptions Underlying the Separation of ECEC

The construct of ECEC as separate education is based on problematic assumptions. First, as previously stated, this construct is predicated on the assumption that there is a separate period in life called ‘early childhood’, when children have particular needs that

differ from those of older human beings. There are, of course, obvious maturational differences between older and younger human beings, but it has been argued that the separation between children and adults tends to marginalise children, and may ultimately result in their subjugation.

According to Cannella, for instance, the separation of children from adults and the creation of special spaces has objectified children and reinforced a dualism between children and adults.¹⁵ Power is enacted through this dichotomy. Children are seen as separate and 'other'. As 'others' they tend to be constructed as vulnerable and dependent, whereas adults hold "total power, legitimizing both explicit and implicit subjugation".¹⁶ Such constructions of children fail to recognise them as productive and contributory. Older humans make decisions for younger human beings. The voice of the child is unheard and their knowledge is denied.¹⁷ The separation of ECEC from later education is likely to reinforce and compound the 'othering' of children.

As Cannella suggests, the separation of young children from the adult world is indeed a concern. Even though all adults have gone through the ontogenesis of childhood, we tend to construct children as somehow 'different' and 'separate'. This distancing may in turn contribute to some adults feeling unsympathetic towards children, and that children are not their concern. Indeed, such sentiments have been evident in recent arguments in

¹⁵ G. S. Cannella, 'Natural born curriculum: Popular culture and the representation of childhood', in J. A. Jipson, & R. T. Johnson (eds.), *Resistance and Representation: Rethinking Childhood Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 15 – 22, p.20.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p.20.

¹⁷ 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.

NSW, that have asserted that adults without children should not be held accountable for, or forced to contribute to, the well-being of 'other people's children'.¹⁸

Yet, contrary to Cannella's argument, recognising that young children are different, need not necessarily lead to their subjugation. Young children are vulnerable to their surrounds, and it may be necessary to recognise their 'special needs' in order to protect and nurture them. It also needs to be acknowledged that, despite the concerns raised by Cannella, upholding the idea of 'early childhood' is also in the best interests of early childhood professionals. Without the concept of early childhood, ECEC might cease to exist. So the continued reinforcement of the construct of early childhood as birth to eight is a means of legitimising the work of the early childhood professional, in both prior-to-school and school-based settings. As such, it can be viewed as a means of self-affirmation.

A second assumption underlying the construct of ECEC as separate education is that children's early life experiences are important, not just in the present, but particularly for their later development, and may even determine their future outcomes.¹⁹ The 'importance of the early years' is such a dominant idea that it has become one of the 'truths' of ECEC. It is also continually reinforced by other discourses, particularly scientific child development discourses, which are critiqued later. The importance of the early years is seldom questioned, and ideas which counter this construct are rarely heard. But the focus on the early years may be problematic as discussed below.

¹⁸ See for instance the website www.childfree.com.au.

¹⁹ Lero, 'Early childhood education'; Thelander, 'Early childhood education policy and 2010'.

The assumption that early life experiences are important for later development has legitimated intervention into the lives of children and their families. Cannella has argued that this intervention has resulted in families, and in particular the mother-child relationship, being scrutinised.²⁰ One of the consequences of this intervention and scrutiny is that when children fail to operate within the boundaries of what is considered 'normal behaviour', often prescribed by child development knowledge, the family becomes the focus of concern. Families tend to be constructed as the source of societal problems, and wider social and political factors are apt to be ignored.²¹ Furthermore, focusing on the early years tends to reinforce the idea of the primacy of the mother-child relationship and uphold patriarchal constructs of essentialised motherhood.²² The essentialisation of care has potentially devastating consequences for ECEC, as discussed in the following chapter examining the construct of ECEC as 'women's work'.

Moreover, along with a sense of urgency to intervene into children's lives, a pervasive pessimism is created by this focus on the early years. For instance, in a paper written for the World Bank entitled *Early Child Development: Investing in the Future*, Young states:

Because of the importance of the early years, intervention even in kindergarten may be too late to help develop young children's capacities.²³

²⁰ G. S. Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education: Social Justice and Revolution* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

²¹ N. Norguay, 'Social difference and the problem of the "unique individual": An uneasy legacy of child-centred pedagogy', *Canadian Journal of Education*, 24 (2) (1999), 183 – 196.

²² K. Anijar, 'Childhood and caring: A capitalist taxonomy of Mar(x)ket place', in M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / Early Childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang), 283 – 299; B. Pamphilon, 'Discourses of mothering: What can we learn from the past?', *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*, 6 (2) (1999), 240 – 248.

²³ M. Young, *Early Childhood Development: Investing in the Future* (Washington, D.C: The World Bank, 1996). Accessed on 25 February, 2004, from: www.worldbank.org.

Such a statement is deeply concerning. It implies that if not ‘captured’ early, a child’s ‘potential’ is severely compromised. Such statements may be expedient for attracting funding into ECEC, but they may also come at a cost to equity in the distribution of funds. If education after kindergarten is considered ‘too late’, then governments might argue that it is a waste of resources to ‘invest’ in the later part of the lifespan. If all the attention is given to the early years, then what of the needs of older children? As Adele Horin wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

How is Australia to help the lost tribe of teenagers and young adults who don’t fit into the new economy, who are too old for fairy stories? Tens of thousands of them are floundering beyond the reach of ‘early childhood’ policies, unable to get a toehold.²⁴

What happens to children who fail to get their entitlement to a ‘good start’? What of those who, given the best start in the world, later experience events that impair their growth? Do we then resign these children to the ‘scrap heap’, like so much human detritus? Or should we continue to invest in better outcomes throughout the lifespan?

The recent focus on the early years in Australia may be hailed as long overdue and there are concerns that it may fade as swiftly as it came. Indeed, interest in ECEC does seem to have waned considerably. When Mark Latham was elected Federal Opposition Leader in 2002, his first question to parliament was about ECEC. Addressing his question to the Prime Minister Mr Howard, Latham asked:

Given the compelling evidence from international research that the first five years of a child’s life are the most important for their later learning and development, can the Prime Minister explain to the house why the government has still not produced any early childhood strategy.²⁵

²⁴ A. Horin, The kids who go in the too-hard basket. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December, 2003, p.7.

²⁵ M. Latham, *House of Representatives Official Hansard, No 19. Fortieth Parliament, First Session – Sixth Period*. Commonwealth of Australia, 2 December, 2003, 23417.

ECEC also featured prominently both in the 2004 Federal Budget and during the 2004 Australian Federal election. Significantly, the provision of ECEC made front page news, placing it squarely in the public arena.²⁶ But following the successful return to Government of the Liberal / National Coalition, there have been few media reports about ECEC, even during the coverage of 2005 Federal Budget. Given the fleeting nature of political interest in early childhood in Australia, it is not surprising that ECEC advocates take every opportunity that attention to ECEC offers, to make a loud and clear case for investment in ECEC, but we need to ensure that this advocacy does not come at the expense of other periods of the lifespan, or it has the potential to create tensions between advocates essentially all working for the same thing — the improvement of life chances, especially for the most disadvantaged Australians.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Separate Education: Marginalising ECEC

Being ‘protectionist’ about the early childhood period and arguing for it as a ‘special case’, may in fact reinforce the boundaries that marginalise early childhood. As previously noted, the construction of ECEC as separate from later education has resulted in a diverse array of children’s services that have evolved to respond to the needs of children, their families and the community. However, these services are marginalised. Unlike schooling, access to early childhood settings is not considered a right and falls outside the parameters of universal provision.²⁷ Whilst fee assistance is available to families, the care and education of young children remains chiefly the responsibility of families, not government.²⁸ Why does this disparity in funding exist?

²⁶ For debates about the 2004 Australian Budget see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 May, 2004, pp.1 – 4.

²⁷ Press & Hayes, *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*.

²⁸ The unsuccessful Federal Labor party promised that if elected to Government, that they would provide some free childcare and preschool education for children in the year prior to school. This policy

Why shouldn't ECEC be considered a right? Perhaps one reason is that ECEC continues to be constructed as 'care' rather than 'education'.

Whilst those within ECEC may consider the care / education dichotomy as outdated, in the wider community the joint functions of ECEC as care and education are not so clearly understood.²⁹ Such confusion was evident, for example, in statements attributed to the Labor leader Latham during the 2004 Federal election campaign. As previously highlighted, ECEC was an important aspect of Labor's platform. Latham promised to:

... extend the principles of public education into our child-care and preschool systems.³⁰

But Labor would:

... only fund new long day care centres that offer preschool education [and] long day centres would have to either incorporate a preschool program into their own operations or have an association with an established preschool service.³¹

Whilst recognising the educational value of ECEC, such statements continue to suggest that early childhood care is discrete from education and that government should only fund the educative components.

Moss and Brannen have argued that the construction of care as a parent's responsibility has emerged within neo-liberal discourses.³² Neo-liberal perspectives place supreme

would have been an historic shift (C. Marriner, & M. Riley, Free childcare — Labor's election baby. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 February, 2004, p.1).

²⁹ See for instance: J. Brannen, & P. Moss (eds.), *Rethinking Children's Care* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003).

³⁰ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 September, 2004, p.12.

³¹ C. Marriner, Labor holds out the promise of preschool for all. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June, 2004, p.3.

³² 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); See also: G. Dahlberg, & P. Moss, *Ethics and politics in early childhood* (London: Routledge, 2005).

importance on the individual.³³ Such a position places responsibility for childcare on the family. As Moss and Brannen say: "From these liberal perspectives, children's care is an essentially private concern, allocated to the private sphere of the family".³⁴ Whereas education has been enshrined as a right in NSW, no such contingency exists for care. Until care and education become merged and indivisible, ECEC is likely to remain marginalised.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Separate Education: Crossing Educational Borders

A further problem with the construction of ECEC as separate education is that children must cross the borders between educational sites. In recent times, there has been increasing concern about children's transition across the boundaries of one service to the next. Of particular concern for ECEC is the transition from prior-to-school settings to school, and the issue of 'readiness for school', that is, children's intellectual, emotional, social and physical preparedness for school.³⁵

The separation between ECEC and later schooling places a burden on both children and parents. Children have to prove they are 'ready' to attend school. In one ludicrous situation, potential four-year-old 'clients' of a private school in Sydney have to undergo a school readiness test before enrollment is allowed.³⁶ Children, then, are required to meet the needs of the school, rather than the other way around.

³³ N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁴ Moss & Brannen, 'Concepts relationships and policies', p.17.

³⁵ See for instance Dockett & Perry, *Beginning School Together*.

³⁶ L. Doherty, School vets infants with intelligence test. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 November, 2003, p.2. See also, R. Gardner, Poppet on a string. *The Sydney Morning Herald supplement - Good Weekend*, 11 September, 2004, pp.49 – 54.

In addition, parents are expected to assess their children's 'readiness' and make judgments about whether or not to send them to school. It seems that every year, at enrolment time or at the beginning of each new school year, transition to school is a 'hot topic' in the media.³⁷ Parents are assailed with information and advice about how to discern if their child is ready for school. No doubt parents' concerns would be heightened by these newspaper reports, such as the one that suggested:

Children may be placed at risk by starting school very early.³⁸

It seems parents are heeding these dire warnings and are increasingly 'holding back' children who are of a legal age to start school.³⁹ Indeed, Devine, in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, declared:

Delaying school entry has become a religion worldwide.⁴⁰

But the option to 'hold back' children may not be available to all parents. As previously stated, school-based education is free whilst ECEC is not. Those parents who may be under financial stress may not be in a position to choose to hold back their children.⁴¹ Therefore, any advantages to being held back are not likely to be available for those children from poor families. As has been highlighted, the construction of ECEC as separate has created artificial boundaries that children and their families need to negotiate. If ECEC had not been separated from later education these transition problems would most likely not exist.

³⁷ See for instance: L. Doherty, Too old, too young, or just right for kindy. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 June, 2004, p.1.

³⁸ C. Woodrow, Do your homework before school to shape young minds for the future. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 September, 2003, p.3.

³⁹ M. Devine, Mistake we make with those April-born boys. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 September, 2003, p.15.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ A. Horin, Call for free access to preschools. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 May, 2004, p.5.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Separate Education: ECEC as Preparation

Lastly, the construction of ECEC as separate education tends to construct ECEC as preparation for later schooling, placing increasing pressure on ECEC pedagogy and curriculum. For instance, there is a danger that focusing on preparing children for 'crossing the educational border' may force ECEC teachers to adopt a 'top down approach' to teaching, wherein pressures to prepare children for 'the next stage' become the focus of the curriculum, rather than focusing on the educational concerns that the child is currently experiencing. Penn, for instance, argues that pressure to prepare children for school has resulted in an increased focus on curriculum areas such as literacy and numeracy in the ECEC setting.⁴² Whilst literacy and numeracy are legitimate components of the ECEC curriculum, it is a concern when the focus results in inappropriate expectations or the exclusion of other areas of learning.

To illustrate how pervasive these ideas are, in a report from Washington, United States, published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, it was argued:

Educators find themselves under growing pressure to make school more rigorous, in the belief that children who are behind academically by the age of six or seven have a difficult time catching up.⁴³

Referring to the common practice of afternoon naps in ECEC settings, the reporter quoted two educators, the 'chief' of Prince George's County School, who stated:

Nap time needs to go away ... we need to get rid of all the baby school stuff they used to do.⁴⁴

And the co-ordinator of Anne Arundel County early childhood program, who said:

This is not a child-care program; it's an educational program.⁴⁵

⁴² H. Penn (ed.), *Early Childhood Services: Theory, Policy and Practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).

⁴³ N. Trejos, Sleepless tots learn not to be dozy. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 March, 2004, p.10.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

I do not suggest that 'nap time' is either a good or bad practice. What is instructive here is that both educators are trying to distance themselves from early childhood practices in order to differentiate and legitimise their work as educational. It is also interesting to reflect upon how these ideas, forged half a world away, might enter into the public domain in NSW and perhaps shift the construction of ECEC here.

To summarise this section, the construction of ECEC as separate education is built on some problematic assumptions about the early childhood period. Moreover, the separation between education for older and younger children may be potentially oppressive and marginalising. But the construct of ECEC as separate from later education has become so intimately interwoven with early childhood education in NSW, that it has become a 'truth' of practice, and resistant to change. It is, nevertheless, a construct. There is no inherent reason why ECEC should be separate from later education.

One of my aims in this thesis is to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions by showing how constructs of ECEC were socially constructed. As such, I challenge the construct of ECEC as separate education, by examining the period when ECEC first emerged as separate ECEC in NSW. In Chapter Five, I show how the education of children younger than six years was not always separate from that of older children but a consequence of particular historical discourses at the end of the nineteenth century. It is, therefore, possible to construct ECEC in other ways, perhaps as Moss suggests, as an integral part of a wider conception of education.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ 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.

Construct Two: ECEC as Progressive Education

The second construct I have identified in the contemporary texts examined for this study is ECEC as child-centred, play-based pedagogy that focuses on individual development towards autonomy. I have called this construct 'progressive education', as this term captures the focus on individual freedom and choice, creative self-expression, and development towards social responsibility, characteristic of the Progressive education movement of the early twentieth century.⁴⁷ I do not mean to suggest, however, that the contemporary construct has the same meaning as the historical.

The progressive construct of ECEC constructs early education and care as a way of contributing to the formation of individuals and focuses on developing the 'human capital' of individual children to assist them to reach their 'potential'.⁴⁸ Such sentiments are expressed by Gammage, for instance, who says ECEC is concerned with:

The establishment of enjoyment in learning and of appropriate motivation, as well as coupled with a growing sense of purpose and autonomy and the highly fulfilling nature of early learned success and self-responsibility.⁴⁹

Another aspect of progressive education, also evident in the above statement by Gammage, is an imperative for ECEC to be enjoyable.

⁴⁷ J. Lergessner, 'The progress of progressive education reform in the United States, 1890 – 1970', *Australia and New Zealand History of Education Society Journal*. 4 (2) (1975), 34 – 46; M. Olssen, J. Codd, & A-M. O'Neill, *Education Policy: Globalization, Citizenship & Democracy* (London: Sage, 2004); W. J. Reese, 'Grassroots movements during the progressive era,' in R. Lowe (ed.), *History of Education: Major Themes. Vol III Studies in Learning and Teaching* (London: Routledge, 1986 / 2000), 69 – 87; W. Reese, 'The origins of progressive education', *History of Education Quarterly*. 41 (1) (2001), 1 – 24.

⁴⁸ G. Dahlberg, P. Moss, & A. Pence, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Postmodern Perspectives* (London: Falmer Press, 1999).

⁴⁹ P. Gammage, 'Early childhood education and care Vade Mecum for 2002', *Early Years*. 22 (2) (2002), 184 – 188.

Typically play is seen as the pedagogical tool of choice within ECEC to encourage active learning through intrinsically motivating experiences. The play-based nature of ECEC has become firmly entrenched as a defining feature of ECEC. Cannella, for instance, contends that play has been valorised as the normal condition of childhood and the optimum process through which children learn.⁵⁰ Indeed, Ailwood says: “Play is widely viewed by early childhood educators as promoting the learning and development of young children to the point of being a cliché”.⁵¹

Another aspect of the progressive construct of ECEC is that its pedagogy is dynamic and evolving. This perspective is evident in the abridged version of one of the most recent documents informing ECEC in NSW, the *NSW Curriculum Framework*, which states:

Early childhood practices have always had a somewhat dynamic nature, shifting over the years to reflect theories, research, developing trends and indeed the changing composition of Australian society.⁵²

Further, the document states, ECEC professionals are encouraged:

... to think creatively and innovatively.⁵³

And the Framework is supposed to:

... empower them [ECEC professionals] to take risks and seriously contemplate the unorthodox.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*.

⁵¹ J. Ailwood, ‘Governing Preschool: Producing and Managing Preschool Education in Queensland Government Schools.’ PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2002, p.96.

⁵² Office of Childcare, *The Framework Abridged Version* (Sydney: NSW Department of Community Services, 2002), p.8.

⁵³ 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), p.9.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

Such statements construct ECEC as innovative, and somewhat radical. But the individualistic focus, as well as the play-based and dynamic nature of ECEC, is problematic as will be discussed below.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Progressive Education: The Individual Focus

The first point of contention with the progressive construct of ECEC is its focus on the individual. This focus reflects dominant Western liberal / progressive ideals of individuality and freedom but also more recent neo-liberal ideas of individual responsibility.⁵⁵ Consequently, although individuals may be given freedom to choose, the expectation is that they will choose wisely, and they are held accountable for their choices and for their 'failures'. But our freedom to choose is illusory as we operate in a regulated world.⁵⁶ That is, the choices we make are limited and governed by what is socially available. In this way, Rose asserts individuals are "potentially active in their own government".⁵⁷ Within ECEC, children's choices are similarly governed. Children are given the opportunity to make individual choices, but these choices are carefully prescribed and controlled; children are then held accountable for the choices they make.

Liberal / progressive ideals may be constraining ECEC. Apple argues that neo-liberalism aims to create individuals who are able to operate and contribute to the 'common good', in an increasingly competitive social world.⁵⁸ This is an important role of education, but these ideals tend to uphold conservative functional views of education

⁵⁵ Olssen, Codd & O'Neill, *Education Policy*; C. Symes, & N. Preston, *Schools and Classrooms: A Cultural Studies Analysis of Education* (2nd ed.) (South Melbourne: Longman, 1997);

⁵⁶ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*.

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p.142.

⁵⁸ M. W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (2nd ed.) (New York: Routledge, 1990).

that only value knowledge that enhances human capital.⁵⁹ As such, progressive ideals may limit the potential of ECEC to be more than mere preparation for later schooling or engagement in paid work.

Further, ECEC based on liberal / progressive ideals which focus on the individual, fails to acknowledge how oppressive external political, economic and societal factors, such as poverty and racist policies affect children's chances of success.⁶⁰ If early childhood professionals fail to take into account how social forces impact upon children's lives, they are in danger of upholding dominant forces and perpetuating injustice.⁶¹

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Progressive Education: The Play Focus

In addition to the focus on the individual, there are a number of concerns with the dominance of play as a pedagogical choice within progressive constructs.⁶² First, play tends to conjure up images of a romanticised and idyllic childhood.⁶³ But a playful childhood may be far from the lived reality of many children. By valorising play are we negating the life experiences of these children? Moreover, are we perhaps losing sight of alternative ways of learning?

⁵⁹ Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*.

⁶⁰ 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; 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; Norguay, 'Social difference and the problem of the "unique individual": An uneasy legacy of child-centred pedagogy',.

⁶¹ Norguay, 'Social difference and the problem of the "unique individual"'.

⁶² See Ailwood 'Governing Preschool', for a detailed discussion and critique of play in ECEC. She identifies at least four discourses of play evident in the literature these are romantic / nostalgic; play characteristics; developmental discourse; contexts and relations. See also: J. Ailwood, 'Governing early childhood education through play', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 4 (3) 2003, 286 – 299.

⁶³ Ailwood, 'Governing Preschool'.

Second, play is not a free activity in ECEC. For instance, Ailwood, who uses Foucaultian notions of governmentality to challenge play, argues that it is a “regulatory regime of truth” and a “technology of governmentality”.⁶⁴ That is, far from being value free, power operates through play in ECEC settings as it is regulated and governed by the materials available to children as well as the time constraints of the settings. For instance, negotiations over resources during play may serve to uphold gender stereotypes.⁶⁵ Play is also monitored and restricted because of concerns for children’s safety and only certain types of play are considered ‘appropriate’ in ECEC settings.⁶⁶ For example, ‘rough and tumble’ play is often curbed in ECEC settings. In addition, early childhood educators, often informed by child development knowledge, which will be problematised later in the chapter, make decisions about what constitutes ‘normal’ play, when and with whom children may play, as well as what they should do in their play. As will be argued later, much of the research that informs their decision making is informed by Western theories and ideologies.⁶⁷

Further, the play focus in ECEC may marginalise children and ECEC. Strandle, for instance, says that play has become differentiated from adult activity.⁶⁸ She argues that this has led to the trivialising of play and serves to exclude children. The play-based nature of ECEC may also have consequences for the construct of the early childhood profession. There is concern within the field of ECEC that the profession is not highly

⁶⁴ Ailwood, ‘Governing Preschool’, p.95.

⁶⁵ G. MacNaughton, *Shaping Early Childhood: Learners, Curriculum and Contexts* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003).

⁶⁶ Ailwood, ‘Governing Preschool’; Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*.

⁶⁷ Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*.

⁶⁸ H. Strandle, ‘What is the use of children’s play?: Preparation or social participation’, in H. Penn (ed.), *Early Childhood Services: Theory, Policy and Practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 147 – 157.

regarded.⁶⁹ The focus on play suggests that ECEC curriculum is carefree and 'natural'.⁷⁰ As such, the naturalistic nature of play may be contributing to the view of ECEC as an unskilled profession.⁷¹

Problematizing the Construct of ECEC as Progressive Education: The Dynamic Nature of ECEC Pedagogy

A final problematic aspect of the progressive construct of ECEC is its emphasis on the dynamic and evolving nature of ECEC. Whilst this construct implies that the ECEC profession is responsive to new ideas and the changing needs of children and families, it also seems to suggest a degree of uncertainty and dissatisfaction in the profession. Not that uncertainty is itself necessarily negative, but constant shifting and experimentation could be interpreted as faddish and might even undermine the profession.

To summarise this section, the progressive construct of ECEC as child-centred, play-based, dynamic pedagogy has many positive aspects; it is focused on children, aims to provide enjoyable learning experiences and is responsive to change. But, as has been shown above, the construct is not without problems.

The construct of ECEC as progressive education, concerned as it is with the development of the individual through enjoyable learning experiences, seems to be so

⁶⁹ D. Fraser, 'Children's services: A vision for the future', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. 25 (1) (2000), 1 – 7; J. Hayden, 'Beyond Mr Bubbles: An analysis of the public image of early childhood care and education in Western Sydney', *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*. 1 (1996), 65 – 76.

⁷⁰ D. Phillips, & M. Whitebook, 'The child care provider: Pivotal player in the child's world', in L. Weiss, P. G. Altbach, G. P. Kelly, & H. G. Petrie (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Early Childhood Education* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 25 – 43.

⁷¹ Anijar, 'Childhood and caring; H. A. De Lair, & E. Erwin, 'Working perspectives within feminism and early childhood education', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 1 (2) (2000), 153 – 170.

natural and 'right' that it is difficult to see it is a construct. Through my historical research, I have been able to 'denaturalise' the progressive construct. As I discuss in Chapter Six, I have found that the construct of ECEC as progressive education emerged within liberal / progressive discourses, dominant in the late nineteenth century. These discourses created a space where Kindergarten could emerge as a 'new' form of progressive education. Many of the ideas about education that emerged at that time continue to influence contemporary ECEC. Closely linked to the construction of ECEC as progressive education, is the construct of ECEC as scientific education and care.

Construct Three: ECEC as Scientific Education and Care

Particularly dominant in the texts I examined is the construct of ECEC as 'scientific education and care', that is, education and care informed by science and concerned with children's development. The scientific construct of ECEC is upheld, for instance, by media reports that associate ECEC with scientific research. For example, a recent media report on research stated:

Babies who start childcare before they are six months old settle in more easily and are happier in the early weeks than infants who start aged eight months or older.⁷²

The reader was provided with scientific evidence that explained children's behaviours in ECEC. Whilst the research reported here directly related to children's experiences in ECEC, sometimes the relationships between the research and implications drawn for ECEC seem more tenuous. For instance, one article lead with the line:

Guilt stricken parents take note: it seems your baby does realise you will return after work.⁷³

⁷² A. Horin, Childcare: Sooner the better. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 November, 2004, p.3.

⁷³ G. Jacobson, & R. Highfield, Peek-a-boo: When you go to work, baby knows it's not a vanishing act. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August, 2003, p.1. Object permanence is a Piagetian term given to the development of understanding that objects continue to exist even when not in view, which Piaget believed did not fully develop until the second year of life. T. J. Berndt, *Child Development* (2nd ed.) (Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark, 1997).

This article reported on findings from research on ‘object permanence’, and suggested that these findings had implications for parents of children in childcare. Such media reports ‘naturalise’ a relationship between ECEC and science.

As well as being informed by science, ECEC is constructed as scientific education and care through its close affiliation to ‘child development’. ECEC, perhaps more than education at any other time in the lifespan, is constructed as facilitating children’s development in a scientific way by contributing to measurable child development outcomes. Young, for instance, states ECEC is able to:

... build human resources in a scientifically proven manner.⁷⁴

Similarly, the construct of ECEC as child development was evident in the Australian Federal Labor Party’s 2004 election promise to increase funding for ECEC. As mentioned previously, Latham, Labor’s leader at the time, promised if elected to increase funding for ECEC, but only if it could prove its developmental credentials.

Latham was quoted as saying:

It’s not just about childcare as child minding. We want childcare to be early childhood development.⁷⁵

A quote in *The Sydney Morning Herald* from a mother of a child who attended childcare suggests parents too recognise the importance of child development knowledge:

If you’re going to relinquish care of your child you want it to be to people who keep ahead of all the cutting-edge research in development.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Young, *Early Childhood Development*.

⁷⁵ C. Marriner, It’s raining cash for childcare, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 September, 2004, p.1.

⁷⁶ A. Clarke, No expense spared on Byron’s preschool, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 – 2 October, 2005, p.6.

Of particular significance, in regards to a child development focus in ECEC, have been the guidelines for *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP).⁷⁷ This document, which argues for ECEC practices to be based on sound child development knowledge, was widely influential in ECEC in NSW, particularly in the 1990s. Today, the child development focus continues, through legislation and documents governing ECEC, such as the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System, the NSW Children's Services Regulation, and the NSW Curriculum Framework.⁷⁸ For instance, the NSW Children's Services Regulation states primary contact staff must have:

... a basic knowledge of the stages of physical, emotional, cognitive, social and cultural development of children, and a basic knowledge of activities and learning experiences that are appropriate for the various ages and stages of development of children ... [they must also ensure they maintain] a developmental record for each child.⁷⁹

ECEC, then, is constructed both as being informed by science and as being concerned with the 'science' of child development. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, for instance, claim that developmental psychology is hegemonic and has "established a dominant position in the field of early childhood".⁸⁰ Similarly, Grieshaber and Cannella assert that child development knowledge is pervasive and has become a 'grand narrative' that has dominated understandings about children within ECEC.⁸¹

⁷⁷ S. Bredekamp (ed.), *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Servicing children from Birth through age 8* (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1987); Bredekamp & Copple, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*.

⁷⁸ Informed by their knowledge of child development, early childhood professionals are required to implement programs that foster children's development (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; 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; 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.

⁷⁹ Department of Family and Community Services, *Children's Services Regulation*, 2004.

⁸⁰ Dahlberg et al., *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*, p.15.

⁸¹ Grieshaber & Cannella, 'From identity to identities'.

Child development knowledge has provided valuable insights into the ways in which children grow and learn. It has constructed frameworks for understanding children, and has influenced early childhood educators' beliefs about children's needs.⁸² Furthermore, child development knowledge has provided scientific legitimisation for ECEC practices.⁸³ Nevertheless, over the past decade or so some serious concerns have been raised about ECEC's reliance on child development knowledge, particularly in relation to how it determines early childhood education practices.⁸⁴

ProblematISING the Construct of ECEC as Scientific Education and Care

My problematisation of the scientific construct of ECEC falls into two parts. First, I discuss literature that has questioned the scientific 'truth' claims of child development. I go on to look in greater depth at one particular area of science, 'brain research', that has been used repeatedly to uphold the scientific construct of ECEC. Second, I discuss literature that has raised concerns that, as well as governing childhood, a focus on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in ECEC may be contributing to inequitable practices. Finally, I critique these problematisations of DAP.

ProblematISING the Construct of ECEC as Scientific Education and Care: Questioning Scientific Truths

The construct of ECEC as scientific education and care is predicated on the assumption that science can deliver the 'truth' about how children develop. But writers applying

⁸² Grieshaber & Cannella, 'From identity to identities'; Dahlberg *et al.*, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*.

⁸³ 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.

⁸⁴ Goffin, 'Child development knowledge and early childhood teacher preparation'.

postmodern analyses to their critique of ECEC have argued that the epistemological concepts on which child development knowledge is based are questionable.⁸⁵

Jipson and Lubeck, for instance, have highlighted how child development knowledge is based on positivist, scientific models of truth and objectivity.⁸⁶ As discussed in Chapter One, in the postmodern era, notions of universalistic, transcendental, totalising truth claims, based on empiricist and rationalist knowledge have been challenged.⁸⁷ As such, the postmodern critique has enabled several writers to question the 'truths' of child development. Jipson, for example, argues that the field of child development, which attempts to find universal truths of child development and child rearing, creates categories of normality that subjugate those outside these parameters as 'abnormal'.⁸⁸

In addition, several writers have argued that theories of child development are value laden and reflect dominant Western, middle-class values. Bloch, for instance, contends that child development knowledge, which focuses on the supremacy of the individual, reflects dominant Western theories of subjectivity.⁸⁹ This view supposes that the individual is knowable, predictable and subject to evaluation.⁹⁰ It upholds dominant

⁸⁵ Bloch, 'Critical perspectives on the historical relationship between child development and early childhood research'; Cannella, 'Natural born curriculum'; S. Lubeck, 'Deconstructing "child development knowledge" and "teacher preparation"', *Early Childhood Quarterly*, 11 (1996), 147 – 176.

⁸⁶ J. J. Jipson, 'Developmentally appropriate practice: Culture, curriculum, connections', in M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / Early Childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 221 – 239; Lubeck, 'Deconstructing "child development knowledge" and "teacher preparation"'.
⁸⁷ 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); R. Usher, & R. Edwards, *Postmodernism and Education* (London: Routledge, 1994); P. Waugh (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992).

⁸⁸ Jipson, 'Developmentally appropriate practice'; See also 'Natural born curriculum'; Grieshaber & Cannella, 'From identity to identities'; Goffin, 'Child development knowledge and early childhood teacher preparation'; Lubeck, 'Deconstructing "child development knowledge" and "teacher preparation"'.
⁸⁹ Bloch, 'Critical perspectives on the historical relationship between child development and early childhood research'.

⁹⁰ See also Grieshaber & Cannella, 'From identity to identities'; Lubeck, 'Deconstructing "child development knowledge" and "teacher preparation"'.

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individualistic ideology that fosters competition, and marginalises collective ideology, that favours group behaviours. Likewise, Woodrow and Brennan argue that child development theories privilege rationality. They refer, for example, to socialisation theories that “construct the child as passive, immature, incompetent, and irrational”.⁹¹ In a similar way, Cannella asserts that theories of child development reflect Western ideals of progressive idealism.⁹² She argues that because theories of development are linear, progressive, and deterministic, they construct human development as a continuum from less to more mature. The goal of this developmental continuum is towards Western ideals, such as abstract thought, independence and self reliance. Furthermore, according to Cannella, a progressive notion of development suggests that young children are somehow ‘unfinished’ or less human.⁹³ Likewise, Anijar suggests that such a construct of the child values them, not for who they are, but only as emergent human beings.⁹⁴ Such postmodern critiques of child development have, then, been particularly valuable for challenging the ways power operates through scientific constructs to produce subjective positions. Accordingly, writers such as Ryan and Grieshaber encourage the ECEC field to use postmodern understandings to reflect on their practices and to question its truths.⁹⁵

It must be acknowledged, however, that many of the epistemological and methodological concerns raised above, have been considered by theorists within the

⁹¹ 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, p.30.

⁹² Cannella, ‘Natural born curriculum’; see also Lubeck, ‘Deconstructing “child development knowledge” and “teacher preparation”’.

⁹³ Cannella, ‘Natural born curriculum’.

⁹⁴ Anijar, ‘Childhood and caring’.

⁹⁵ S. Ryan, & S. Grieshaber, ‘Shifting from developmental to postmodern practices in early childhood teacher education’, *Journal of Teacher Education*. 56 (1) (2005), 34 – 45.

field of child development and psychology.⁹⁶ In particular, biases inherent in the formation of child development knowledge have been widely recognised, and a universalistic approach to child development is now largely discredited.⁹⁷ Consequently, there is an increasing acceptance, amongst some child development theorists, of the need to acknowledge the socio-cultural biases inherent in child development research and a move to more ecological theories of development that recognise and incorporate ethnic, social and gender differences.⁹⁸

A particular area of child development in vogue of late, 'brain development', deserves special consideration and is explored below.

Problematising The Construct of ECEC as Scientific Education and Care: The Case of 'Brain Research'

A recent, and to my mind troubling, phenomena in the construct of ECEC as scientific education and care, is the use of findings from neurological research for advocating ECEC. Neurological research, often referred to rather unscientifically as 'brain

⁹⁶ D. Elkind, 'The death of child nature: Education in the postmodern world', *Phi Delta Kappan*. 78 (3) (1997), 241 – 246; K. Gergen, 'Psychological science in a postmodern context', *American Psychologist*. 56 (10) (2001), 803 – 813; M. Glassman, 'Where there is no middle ground', *American Psychologist*. 56 (4) (2001), 369–370; A. Goncu, & J. Becker, 'The problematic relation between developmental research and educational practice', *Human Development*. 43 (4/5) (2000), 266 – 272; S. Greer, 'Falling off the Edge of the Modern World?', *American Psychologist*. 56 (4) (2001), 367 – 368; 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; H. Zimiles, 'On reassessing the relevance of the child development knowledge base to education', *Human Development*. 43 (4/5) (2000), 235 – 245.

⁹⁷ Gergen, 'Psychological science in a postmodern context'; Martin & Sugarman, 'Between the modern and the postmodern'; Glassman, 'Where there is no middle ground'; Zimiles, 'On reassessing the relevance of the child development knowledge base to education'.

⁹⁸ M. Cole, 'Culture in development', in M. Woodhead, D. Faulkner, & K. Little (eds.), *Cultural Worlds of Early Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1998), 11 – 33; Elkind, 'The death of child nature'; J. M. Ernest, 'An alternative approach to studying beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 2 (3) (2001), 337 – 353; S. White, 'The social roles of child study', *Human Development*. 43 (4/5) (2000), 284 – 288.

development' research, is frequently cited in ECEC texts and wider public discourse.⁹⁹

An example is a recent article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* by Fiona Stanley.¹⁰⁰

Advocating the importance of early intervention she writes:

How the brain mechanisms are sculpted or modified is affected by the child's experiences.¹⁰¹

It has become commonplace for writers to cite brain research as scientific, unequivocal evidence that the provision of quality ECEC is important to assist children reach their potential and contribute to society. For instance Elliott, (Editor of the Australian ECEC Journal *Every Child*) contends:

The biggest positive change for young children is the state and federal government's growing understanding of the implication of *brain research*. Evidence that trusting and caring relationships in the early years are vital for children's future development has been widely accepted. It has been a long time since there has been such a strong, public endorsement to invest in these early years.¹⁰²

Similarly, in the same publication, Tainton (Chair of the National Child Care Accreditation Council) states:

Alongside increased understanding of the significance of the early years in a child's life and changing family contexts, research on brain development has shown that positive quality childcare can enhance children's development and plays an important role in reducing criminal activity and poor health later on.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ See for instance, Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing, *Consultation Paper*; Office of Childcare, *The Framework Abridged Version*; J. Rockel, Expanding the discourse of care. Paper presented at the 12th Annual Conference for Australian Research in Early Childhood Education, Monash University, Melbourne, January, 2004; A. Talay-Ongan, 'Neuroscience and early childhood: A necessary partnership', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. 25 (2) (2000), 28 – 33; J. J. Newberger, 'New brain development research — a wonderful window of opportunity to build public support for early childhood education', *Young Children*. 52 (4) (1997), 4 – 9.

¹⁰⁰ Fiona Stanley was Australian of the Year 2003 and is currently director of the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and executive director of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.

¹⁰¹ F. Stanley, Science, logic and common sense drive case for early intervention, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 March, 2005, p.15.

¹⁰² A. Elliott, 'The changing contours of early childhood', *Every Child*. 10 (1) (2004), p.2 [emphasis in the original].

¹⁰³ J. Tainton, 'Quality in children's services', *Every Child*. 10 (1) (2004), 3.

Serious concerns have been raised about the legitimacy of connecting brain research and ECEC.¹⁰⁴ Thompson and Nelson, for instance, express concern about how media reports about brain research result “in overgeneralizations and inappropriate applications of research findings”.¹⁰⁵ They argue that the findings from this research tend to be skewed to correspond with intuitive or formerly held truths. It may be the case that writers who believe early childhood to be a ‘good thing’ have taken hold of the supposed evidence of brain research to advance their own agenda. The statements quoted above have no references to the research that supports these claims. Further, whilst the *NSW Curriculum Framework* states — “The presence of ‘hard’ evidence from neuroscience has assisted society, and politicians in particular, to attribute increasing importance to this period” — the references cited do not include any research that shows specifically how children’s engagement in ECEC can have a direct influence on children’s neurological development.¹⁰⁶

The use of neurological research to advocate ECEC is unsettling. Could this reliance on brain research rebound on those advocating ECEC? As Thompson and Nelson speculate, what if future research no longer supports this position?:

Valuable public interest in early childhood may evaporate as quickly as it has emerged if parents, practitioners, and policymakers conclude that they were misled about how they contribute to optimizing early development, especially if simplified interpretations and applications of research on early brain development do not yield expected outcomes for enhanced intellectual and socioemotional growth.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ L. Corrie, ‘Neuroscience and early childhood? A dangerous liason’, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. 24 (2) (2000), 34 – 40.

¹⁰⁵ R. Thompson, & C. Nelson, ‘Developmental science and the media: Early brain development’, *American Psychologist*. 56 (1) (2001), 5 – 15, p.5.

¹⁰⁶ Office of Childcare, *The NSW Curriculum Framework for Children’s Services: The Practice of Relationships: Essential provisions for children’s services*, p.5.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson & Nelson, ‘Developmental science and the media’, p.6.

There might also be implications beyond the field of ECEC. If advocates seek to attain funding for ECEC on the grounds of enhancing brain development, might this do more harm than good to the very populations for which we are said to be advocating? The evidence from neurological research suggests that it is in the pre-natal period, when the brain is forming that it is the most susceptible to assault from teratogens.¹⁰⁸ It is at this time that intervention, in the form of parent education and adequate nutrition, for instance, is the most beneficial. If the focus, and funding, is shifted away from this crucial period what might be the consequences for children?

Further, the most 'cutting edge' neurological research could be leading us into dangerous territory. Max Bennet, an eminent neuro-biologist, announced at a meeting of researchers, advocates and practioners concerned with issues facing children and youth that:

We now have predictive capacity for identifying youth who will develop depression.¹⁰⁹

What might this finding mean for society? On the positive side, if we can predict which children are likely to develop depression then we *might* be able to intervene and prevent it or reduce its severity. Although there is, as yet, no evidence to support this contention, it would probably mean targeting funds to those considered most in need. On the other hand, if we know which children will develop depression, and we are unable to remedy this situation, then there is an argument for not 'wasting the resources' that might more effectively be spent elsewhere.

¹⁰⁸ J. P. Shonkoff, & D. A. Phillips (eds), *From Neurons to Neighbourhood: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, Washington, D.C. National Academy Press, 2000). Teratogens are known causes of birth defects; an example is the drug Thalidomide, which if taken during pregnancy is known to cause structural deformities in the foetus' limbs (Berndt, *Child Development*).

¹⁰⁹ M. Bennett, Public address. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth — ARC Research Network Planning Workshop, Australian National University, January, 2004.

Moreover, how does the knowledge from neuroscience assist arguments for the provision of early childhood education? There is no extant evidence to show how this research converts into practice. Whilst it is true that a stimulating and nurturing environment has benefits for several areas of development, it has not been shown that children's engagement in ECEC services per se hastens or promotes brain development.¹¹⁰ Perhaps the group care of ECEC may in the future even be found to be harmful for children's neurological development. So on what basis can we claim that ECEC is beneficial for brain development? This question tends to be glossed over in banal statements, like those above, claiming that the early years are important for brain development.

Why is neurological research so popular? And why is it that the continuous use of findings from neurological research to justify and uphold ECEC practice has received so little critique? Is it perhaps because 'brain research', with its highly technical image, holds power in the twenty-first century? The use of findings from neurological research to support ECEC might be seductive, particularly considering the dominance of scientific discourses, but, in consideration of the above concerns, do we really want to make neurological research our bedfellow?

Scientific discourses have legitimated ECEC practices and validated the work of ECEC professionals.¹¹¹ But when any discourse is used to uphold particular constructs of ECEC, that discourse must be carefully scrutinised, its hidden power revealed, and implications considered. In addition to the critiques discussed above, which have

¹¹⁰ Thompson & Nelson, 'Developmental science and the media'.

¹¹¹ L. Goldstein, 'The distance between feminism and early childhood education: An historical perspective', in M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / early childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 51 – 63.

challenged the truths of science, there have also been concerns raised regarding ECEC's focus on developmentally appropriate practice. I turn to these discussions below.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Scientific Education and Care:

Challenging Developmentally Appropriate Practice

As previously stated, one of the most influential texts informing a developmental focus in ECEC has been Bredekamp's (and later with Copple) *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP).¹¹² DAP is concerned with encouraging ECEC practitioners to use knowledge from child development research to inform their ECEC practice. DAP assumes that, by using this knowledge, early childhood educators can identify the strengths and needs of individual children, and then plan appropriate experiences in order to foster their development. In the last few years, DAP has come under fierce criticism from deconstructionist writers.

Deconstructionists argue that DAP may be contributing to social injustice.¹¹³ For instance, Ryan and Grieshaber assert DAP, based as it is on findings from child development research, tends to uphold dominant Western 'ways of being' in the world and marginalises 'other' ways.¹¹⁴ Further, they argue DAP focuses on the individual and tends to ignore the familial, socio-cultural, political and historical factors that influence children's lives and development.¹¹⁵ Thus, DAP, does little to challenge oppressive practices.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Bredekamp, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Servicing children from Birth through age 8*; Bredekamp & Copple, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*.

¹¹³ Greishaber & Cannella, 'From identity to identities'.

¹¹⁴ Ryan, & Grieshaber, 'Shifting from developmental to postmodern practices in early childhood teacher education'.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Norguay, 'Social difference and the problem of the "unique individual"'.

Other criticisms of DAP focus on its ‘governing’ of children.¹¹⁷ DAP requires the observation and categorisation of children. Cannella, using Foucaultian critiques, argues that, by bringing children under the scientific gaze, DAP is complicit in the disciplining of children. She argues that ECEC has become a colonising power and has created “ordered spaces” which produce, control, regulate and discipline children.¹¹⁸ As such, ECEC is an instrument of power.¹¹⁹ She contends that this power, especially if enacted early in life, may have profound effects on children’s understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

Furthermore, several writers have raised concerns about simply applying child development knowledge to ECEC practices.¹²⁰ They argue that DAP is merely concerned with facilitating development. It is not concerned with what is taught, only that it be taught in a developmentally appropriate manner. Further, they argue that the implementation of DAP cannot be equated with teaching. Although it might inform practice, it should not be the basis of ECEC practice. To merely absorb findings from research unreflectively, which is especially likely to occur if these ideas sit comfortably with our existing beliefs, is inadequate. As Vandenbroek says: “An educational philosophy that is merely based on psychological knowledge of children is insufficient

¹¹⁷ Dahlberg & Moss, *Ethics and politics in early childhood*.

¹¹⁸ G. S. Cannella, ‘The scientific discourse of education: Predetermining the lives of others — Foucault, education, and children’, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 1 (1) (1999), 36 – 44, p.41.

¹¹⁹ Greishaber & Cannella, ‘From identity to identities’.

¹²⁰ J. Brady, *Schooling Young Children: A Feminist Pedagogy for Liberatory Learning* (Albany, New York: State of University of New York, 1995); Jipson, ‘Developmentally appropriate practice’; Goffin, ‘Child development knowledge and early childhood teacher preparation’; L. Katz, ‘Child development knowledge and teacher preparation: Confronting assumptions’, *Early Childhood Quarterly*. 11 (1996), 135 – 146; Lubeck, ‘Deconstructing “child development knowledge” and “teacher preparation”’.

to construct childcare, since it offers no social, economic or political frame of reference.”¹²¹ But critiques of DAP have not gone unchallenged, as I discuss below.

Despite concerns regarding DAP, a number of writers insist we should not lose a child development focus in ECEC. Aldinckle, for example, says that we should not ‘throw the baby out with the bath water’.¹²² Cullen points out that the most recent child development research is culturally sensitive.¹²³ And a number of writers argue, not for the abandonment of DAP, but rather for more critical application of child development knowledge into practice.¹²⁴ Indeed, some suggest that child development knowledge may be essential for contributing to social equity. Garbarino, for instance, argues that emancipatory developmental education, which is concerned with social justice, requires ECEC educators to use child development knowledge to recognise the individual needs, skills and knowledge that children require to operate effectively in the real world, and may be particularly salient for those from ‘impoverished’ backgrounds.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, as Ryan and Grieshaber point out, despite the incorporation of more culturally diverse research about children’s development, the matter of whether DAP is “inclusive of all

¹²¹ 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.

¹²² M. Aldinckle, ‘The DAP debate: Are we throwing the baby out with the bath water?’, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. 26 (2) (2001), 36 – 39.

¹²³ J. Cullen, ‘Why retain a developmental focus in early childhood education?’, in E. J. Mellor, & K. M. Coome (eds.), *Issues in Early Childhood Services* (Dubuque, Iowa: William C Brown, 1994), 53 – 64.

¹²⁴ D. M. Gelfend, ‘Developmental science: What do we know and how do we know it?’, *Human Development*. 43 (4/5) (2000), 252 – 256; Lubeck, ‘Deconstructing “child development knowledge” and “teacher preparation”’; W. P. Robinson, ‘Early childhood education: Notes from the past for the future’, *International Journal of Educational Research*. 29 (1) (1998), 7-24; F. Stott, & B. Bowman, ‘Child development knowledge: A slippery base for practice’, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. 11 (1996), 169 – 183; S. White, ‘The social roles of child study’, *Human Development*. 43 (4/5) (2000), 284 – 288.

¹²⁵ J. Garbarino, ‘Raising children in a socially toxic environment’, *Family Matters*. 50 (1998), 53 – 55.

children's learning ... and whether or not it should be promoted as the base for practice" has yet to be resolved.¹²⁶

Another concern with problematisations of DAP is that writers tend to assume DAP and child development knowledge is hegemonic. This may not be the case. Elkind, for instance, says arguments that suppose an alliance between child development research and ECEC are "quixotic because the presumed relationship between child development research and early childhood educational practice does not exist".¹²⁷ In other words, Elkind denies a relationship between ECEC and child development knowledge.

Perhaps the pervasiveness of DAP in the Australian context has been exaggerated. In a study examining the perceptions of curriculum and DAP of participants in an Australian ECEC setting, Edwards found: "Whilst DAP was perceived as an informant to practice ... the manner in which the informant was utilised depended upon the educator herself".¹²⁸ Rather than construing DAP as a template, it was viewed by practitioners as a guide to practice. Edwards' findings suggest that:

Early childhood educators perceived DAP as a curriculum framework that guides or informs practice over which they themselves had control. The focus in these perceptions on the educators' control over the framework has further suggested that early childhood educators possibly bridge theory and practice with a consideration of how the framework will be utilized.¹²⁹

So the widely held view that DAP is hegemonic, may be misguided in the Australian context.

¹²⁶ Ryan & Grieshaber, 'Shifting from developmental to postmodern practices in early childhood teacher education', p.35.

¹²⁷ Elkind, 'The death of child nature', p.1.

¹²⁸ S. Edwards, 'Teacher perceptions of curriculum: Metaphoric descriptions of DAP', *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*. 11 (2) (2004), 88 – 98, p.93.

¹²⁹ *ibid*, p.96.

A further problem with the critiques of DAP is that they give little regard to spaces for resistance. Scientific discourses, though highly dominant, are not the only discourses within which ECEC has been constructed. There are alternative discourses and constructs of ECEC, and educators are able to reflect on and choose between these. Indeed, in recent years, many ECEC teachers have engaged with pedagogies other than DAP. For instance, social constructivist pedagogies, exemplified by the perspectives put forward by the teachers of Reggio Emilia, have become increasingly influential.¹³⁰ Such social constructivist pedagogies tend to view learning as a collaborative venture, rather than an individual endeavour. No doubt these emergent pedagogies will increasingly become the subject of scrutiny and critique in the coming years.

To summarise this section, ECEC in NSW is constructed as 'scientific education and care'. Concerns have been raised, however, regarding the scientific truth claims of child development, as well as ECEC's reliance on 'brain research', and its focus on developmentally appropriate practice. As such, the construct of ECEC as scientific education and care potentially upholds inequitable practices.

How did the scientific construct of ECEC come to be so dominant? In Chapter Seven, I show how constructs of ECEC as scientific education and care were evident since the inception of ECEC in NSW and emerged out of scientific discourses dominant in the late nineteenth century. In an era that valued scientific rationality, the construction of ECEC as scientific education and care served to legitimate its practices. In much the same way, scientific discourses continue to legitimate and guide ECEC today.

¹³⁰ C. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman (eds.), *The Hundred Languages of Children: Advanced Reflections* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Ablex, 1998). For a critique of Reggio 'discourse' see R. Johnson, 'Colonialism and cargo cults in early childhood education: Does Reggio Emilia really exist', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Education*. 1 (1) (1999), 61 - 78.

Conclusion to Chapter Three

This chapter has problematised three contemporary constructs of ECEC identified in the texts examined: ECEC as separate education, progressive education and scientific education and care. The following chapter describes and problematises the final three contemporary constructs of ECEC identified in these texts, socially just education, national work and women's work.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTEMPORARY CONSTRUCTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE: A CRITICAL REVIEW:

PART TWO

This chapter examines the final three constructs of ECEC identified in the contemporary texts, ECEC as: (iv) socially just education; (v) national work; and (vi) women's work. As in Chapter Three, each construct is identified and then problematised by drawing on deconstructionist literature. These deconstructions are then critiqued and questions are raised regarding how these constructs of ECEC emerged.

Construct Four: ECEC as Socially Just Education

The fourth construct of ECEC evident in the contemporary texts examined for this study is ECEC as 'socially just' education. ECEC is constructed as socially just in two ways. First, as an important way of 'rescuing children' from both the effects of disadvantage and what is seen as an increasingly 'dangerous' society. Second, as a way of actively changing or reforming society by working against inequitable practices. I explore these two constructs below.

ECEC as Socially Just Education: Rescuing Children

The construct of ECEC as rescuing children is clearly evident in statements such as Young's assertion on the World Bank website:

It is well documented that integrated programs in early childhood development can do much to prevent malnutrition, stunted cognitive development, and insufficient preparation for school.¹

¹ M. Young, *Early Childhood Development: Investing in the Future* (Washington, D.C: The World Bank, 1996). Accessed on 25 February, 2004, from: www.worldbank.org, no page number.

Similarly, in the Australian context, Alison Elliott (Editor of the Australian ECEC Journal *Every Child*) states:

Sound early education foundations lead to improved schooling outcomes. Good early childhood programs are especially beneficial for children from vulnerable families.²

A social justice construct of ECEC reflects liberal / progressive ideals which consider education to be an important way of ameliorating and compensating for the effects of poverty and social disadvantage.³ For instance, Fiona Stanley was reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald* as calling:

... for 'enriched childcare' services to be freely available, especially in disadvantaged areas. Research indicated such 'early development centres' made 'an enormous difference' for disadvantaged children.⁴

Both Elliott and Stanley advocate for ECEC because of its potential to 'rescue children' from the disadvantage of their life circumstances. Indeed, the Australian Government gives particular support and priority of access to children considered to be most disadvantaged. These include children from: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds; families that include a person with a disability; families on low incomes; non-English speaking backgrounds; socially disadvantaged communities; single parent families and those at risk of neglect and abuse.⁵

This construct is based on the idea that children need rescuing from what is seen as an increasingly "toxic environment".⁶ Garbarino, for instance, has suggested that children

² A. Elliott, 'An early childhood review?', *Every Child*. 10 (4) (2004), 2.

³ M. W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (2nd ed.) (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁴ L. Martin, A cry for kids: Spend early, save later, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 July, 2003, p.3 [inverted commas in the original]. See also a more recent article advocating early intervention F. Stanley, Science, logic and common sense drive case for early intervention, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 March, 2005, p.15.

⁵ Department of Family and Community Services. *Priority for allocating places in child care services*. Accessed on 10 June, 2005, from: http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/childcare/families-priority_of_access.htm.

⁶ J. Garbarino, 'Raising children in a socially toxic environment', *Family Matters*. 50 (1998), 53 – 55.

in the United States are becoming more vulnerable as “the social environment in which they grow up, has become poisonous to their development”.⁷ He asserts that there are “social pollutants” such as violence, poverty and economic pressures, and that social life is becoming increasingly risky, in particular in the United States, where there is proliferation of guns and violent crimes. Garbarino says these pollutants, along with increasing rates of parental divorce, and poor employment opportunities, undermine children’s sense of security.

The concept of the child in danger is also apparent in Australia.⁸ In a similar way to Garbarino, Stanley argues that social trends in Australia, such as high mobility, smaller families and women’s increasing participation in the workforce, have placed increasing pressures on children and families. Stanley states:

These trends have coincided with what we call the rise of a ‘toxic society’ the result of rapid social, economic technological, spiritual and other changes, some of which have been extremely detrimental to many families and children.⁹

She was further quoted in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, as saying:

‘All other aspects of contemporary child problems’ — from asthma to aggressive behaviour, depression to learning disabilities, eating disorders and even crime — ‘all of these are getting worse and considerably worse’.¹⁰

Garbarino and Stanley assert that contemporary society is poisoning our children, especially in their early years.

⁷ Garbarino, ‘Raising children in a socially toxic environment’, p.54.

⁸ Concerns about children’s vulnerability have become so pressing that researchers, policy makers and practitioners from multiple disciplines have come together to work on the common ‘problem’ of children and youth in an organisation known as the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). Perhaps the multidisciplinary nature of a group such as ARACY will produce new ways of thinking about childhood, and interventions. But to be true to its commitment to innovation ARACY needs not only to recognise the strengths of young people, which requires a shift from the deficit model, but, perhaps more importantly, it needs to engage young people in meaningful and respectful dialogue. It remains to be seen whether there is the willingness and conviction for this exchange to be achieved.

⁹ F. Stanley, ‘The Australian of the Year speaks out for children’, *Young Children*. 9 (3) (2003), 3 [inverted commas in the original].

¹⁰ Martin, ‘A cry for kids’ [inverted commas in the original].

The idea that the early childhood period is particularly dangerous is also evident in the following comment by Larry Anthony, whilst Federal Minister for Children and Youth:

The seeds of poor health, drug dependency, school failure, welfare dependency and criminal behaviour are usually planted in a child's early years.¹¹

Such statements not only construct the child as in need of rescuing, but also suggest that without intervention children will become dangerous. Thus, they legitimate intervention into the lives of children and their families.¹²

ECEC as Socially Just Education: Reforming Society

ECEC is also constructed as socially just education that can change or reform society. This construct of ECEC is evident, for instance, in Young's statement that one reason for providing ECEC services is:

... to achieve greater social equity.¹³

Similarly, the World Bank states that early childhood development projects are beneficial because they:

... encourage greater social equity, increase the efficacy of other investments, and address the needs of mothers while helping their children. Integrated programs for young children can modify the effects of socioeconomic and gender-related inequities, some of the most entrenched causes of poverty.¹⁴

¹¹ L. Anthony, *Foreword. Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing: Consultation paper: Towards the development of a national agenda for early childhood* (Australian Capital Territory: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003), p.iii.

¹² For a discussion of the child as 'threat or monster' see: C. Woodrow, 'Revisiting images of the child in early childhood education: Reflections and considerations', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. 24 (4) (1999), 7 – 12.

¹³ Young, 'Early Childhood Development'.

¹⁴ The World Bank, *Education Notes: Getting an Early Start on Early Child Development*. Accessed on 25 September, 2004, from: <http://www.worldbank.org/education>.

Many ECEC professionals also argue that ECEC should be built on a foundation of social justice, and should work towards creating a more equitable society, not only by redressing inequities but also by challenging socially oppressive practices.¹⁵ To this end they advocate for critical pedagogy.¹⁶ Critical pedagogies recognise that schools provide an important opportunity for the elimination of oppressive practices and that teachers can work towards reducing social inequality.¹⁷ In particular, ECEC is regarded as a powerful way of working towards social justice by addressing issues of race, gender, ethnicity and social class, for instance by engaging with anti-bias curriculum.¹⁸ Creaser and Dau, for example, point out that:

Early childhood practitioners are in an excellent position to positively influence attitudes, to challenge bias, and to prepare all children for a rich, full and productive life.¹⁹

The construct of ECEC as reforming society is also evident in Australian ECEC publications.²⁰ Anthony Semann, for instance, asserts in *Every Child*:

For years, educationalists have been investigating varied ways of ensuring that issues of diversity and democracy are inserted into curriculum which is offered to children, in the hope that biases, stereotypes and discriminatory ideas are challenged and combated at an early age.²¹

¹⁵ See for instance: S. Barnett, 'Developing preschool education policy: An economic perspective', in L. Weiss, P. G. Altbach, G. P. Kelly, & H. G. Petrie (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Early Childhood Education* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 211 – 233; 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; P. Gammage, 'Early childhood education and care Vade Mecum for 2002', *Early Years*, 22 (2) (2002), 184 – 188; C. Symes, & N. Preston, *Schools and Classrooms: A Cultural Studies Analysis of Education* (2nd ed.) (South Melbourne: Longman, 1997).

¹⁶ J. Brady, *Schooling Young Children: A Feminist Pedagogy for Liberatory Learning* (Albany, New York: State of University of New York, 1995).

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ De Lair & Erwin, 'Working perspectives within feminism and early childhood education'. See also: Brady, *Schooling Young Children*; Symes & Preston, *Schools and Classrooms*.

¹⁹ B. Creaser, & E. Dau, *The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood* (Sydney: Harper, 1996), p.13.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ A. Semann, 'Caught in the closet: The silencing of sexuality in early childhood education', *Every Child*, 10 (4) (2004), 20 – 21, p.20.

As the *NSW Curriculum Framework* states:

Working in a children's service is a moral and ethical endeavour [sic].²²

Teaching is a political act.²³ The educational choices that ECEC professionals make everyday in their practice reflect particular moral and political convictions about the society at large. Curricula material teachers choose, the teaching strategies they employ, the very words they use, relate some message about society and so have political significance.

Despite this apparent concern with social justice issues amongst professionals, there is little evidence within the Australian print media of a construct of ECEC as reforming society. References to ECEC in *The Sydney Morning Herald* from May 2002 until December 2005 made no mention of ECEC as challenging oppressive practices, thus suggesting this is not a dominant construct outside the ECEC field.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Socially Just

Who could argue with the construction of ECEC as socially just? Surely this construct, concerned as it is with the marginalised and disenfranchised, is beyond reproach? While I believe that ECEC has an important role to play in contributing to social justice, I argue that this construct cannot be accepted blindly. Below, I raise a number of concerns about the construction of ECEC as socially just education. First, I argue that this construct is built on the notion of the child as vulnerable and as such, may be problematic for children's subjective positioning. Second, I contend that what is taught through curriculum might uphold dominant power structures. Third, I raise concerns

²² Office of Childcare, *The Framework Abridged Version*. (Sydney: NSW Department of Community Services, 2002), p.16.

²³ Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*; De Lair & Erwin, 'Working perspectives within feminism and early childhood education'; H. Penn (ed.), *Early Childhood Services: Theory, Policy and Practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).

about who has access to ECEC. Finally, I discuss how the socially just construct upholds the teacher as a 'saviour' which may be ultimately disadvantageous.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Socially Just: Vulnerable Children

The construction of ECEC as rescuing children may contribute to their marginalisation. Doubtless the best interests of children are at the heart of Garbarino, Stanley and Anthony's statements presented earlier. Yet, to speak of children in terms of rescuing them constructs them as vulnerable. Cannella argues that the construction of children as vulnerable "signifies a being who is weak, lacking, and dependent, a human who is deficient and without agency".²⁴ She goes on to say that it also constructs children as victims — "after all, they have no knowledge; they are stripped of all power; they have been told that they must depend on us for all their needs. Children are constructed as the ideal victim".²⁵ So, by constructing ECEC as rescuing children, we might be perpetuating their vulnerability rather than redressing it.

Further, in our attempt to protect children we may in effect, make them even more susceptible to danger. By viewing the child as in need of "protection from a corrupt society and separation from a contaminated world", we attempt to keep them safe by 'locking them away' — in childcare, after school activities, and so on.²⁶ The creation of these 'special children's spaces' has resulted in the isolation of children from the adult world. Whereas in childcare children may be the subjects of scrutiny, outside of these

²⁴ G. S. Cannella, 'Natural born curriculum: Popular culture and the representation of childhood', in J. A. Jipson, & R. T. Johnson (eds.), *Resistance and Representation: Rethinking Childhood Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 15 – 22, p.18.

²⁵ *ibid*, p.20.

²⁶ *ibid*, p.18.

settings there seems to be decreasing social contact between children and adults.²⁷ Social trends in Australia compound this separation. Families are highly mobile; increasingly both parents work; there is a lack of contact with adults in the extended family; and community networks are difficult to develop.²⁸ There is a danger that these changes could result in children becoming even more vulnerable, as there are fewer adults to watch over them.

Moreover, in our desire to protect children, we may also be isolating them from the 'real world'. Such isolation is problematic because it tends to lead to children's ideas being dismissed. They are not offered the opportunity to engage with real life issues such as illness, racism and social injustice.²⁹ According to Woodrow, this isolation:

... inhibits the potential of children to explore the injustices of their existence and develop skills to deal with the moral inconsistencies and challenges they encounter in their lives and can work to reinforce power differentials between adults and children.³⁰

By attempting to separate children from the harsh realities of life, we may be contributing to their disconnection from that life.

Instead of constructing the child as vulnerable, perhaps we should be advocating for a construct of children as strong, knowledgeable and resourceful.³¹ This seems to be the

²⁷ D. De Vaus, & S. Wise, 'Parents' concerns for the safety of their children', *Family Matters*. 43 (1996), 34 – 37.

²⁸ J. Bowes (ed.), *Children, Families and Communities: Contexts and Consequences* (2nd ed.) (Sydney: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁹ J. Silin, *Sex, Death, and the Education of Children: Our Passion for Ignorance in the Age of AIDS* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995).

³⁰ Woodrow, 'Revisiting images of the child in early childhood education', p.9.

³¹ C. Jenks, 'Child abuse in the postmodern context: An issue of social identity', *Childhood*. 2 (1994), 111 – 121; J. Kitzinger, 'Who are you kidding?: Children, power, and the struggle against sexual abuse', in A. James, & A. Prout (eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: The Falmer Press, 1997), 165 – 198; J. Mason, & B. Steadman, 'The significance of the conceptualisation of childhood for child protection policy', *Family Matters*. 46 (1997), 31 – 35.

image of the child on which the *NSW Curriculum Framework* is based. Throughout this document children are referred to as:

... capable and resourceful.³²

This view values the child and their contributions and knowledge. Yet, the constant use of the term capable and resourceful within this document tends to suggest a single view of the child. Is this view realistic? Are all children capable and resourceful? We need to be wary of such hegemonic claims. Whilst we need to think critically about the potentially negative outcomes of constructions of ECEC as rescuing children; we must not dismiss the fact that many children are exposed to potentially harmful experiences and environments and require protection.

Problematizing the Construct of ECEC as Socially Just: What does the Curriculum Teach?

The construction of ECEC as socially just assumes that children's engagement with education can redress inequalities. ECEC is seen to contribute to children's growth and understanding by assisting them to develop cultural values and practices, knowledge, beliefs and understandings, and skills considered necessary for active participation in society.³³ In terms of social justice, the acquisition of these skills is considered to be particularly important for those children who are disadvantaged.³⁴ Indeed, this is the basis of many compensatory programs.

³² Office of Childcare, *The Framework Abridged Version*, p.21.

³³ S. J. Braun, & E. P. Edwards, *History and Theory of Early Childhood Education* (Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones, 1972); Garbarino, 'Raising children in a socially toxic environment'; V. C. Lascarides, & B. F. Hinitz, *History of Early Childhood Education* (New York: Falmer Press, 2000); D. K. Osborn, *Early Childhood in Historical Perspective* (3rd ed.) (Athens: Day Press, 1991); K. Weiler, 'Feminism and the struggle for democratic education: A view from the United States', in M. Arnott, & K. Weiler (eds.), *Feminism and Social Justice in Education: International Perspectives* (London: The Falmer Press, 1993), 210 – 225.

³⁴ Barnett, 'Developing preschool education policy'; De Lair & Erwin, 'Working perspectives within feminism and early childhood education'; Garbarino, 'Raising children in a socially toxic environment'; D. S. Lero, 'Early childhood education: An empowering force for the twenty-first

The skills, knowledge and understandings identified as essential for 'optimum' growth will vary however, depending on the outcomes desired. To illustrate, if a desired outcome is for children to be computer literate then computer skills training is likely to be identified as an essential component of the curriculum. But who decides what the outcomes should be and the best ways of achieving them?

The transmission of dominant skills and knowledge may simply be perpetuating social injustice. In order to transmit these skills and knowledge, curricula reflect the values of the dominant culture, and so the values and beliefs of minority groups may be marginalised. As Pence says, curricula "often do not reflect, embody or include the people they address — nor the beliefs they hold".³⁵ Moreover, Gomez cautions, because most teachers come from the middle-class, they are likely to continue to uphold dominant Western ideals.³⁶ Indeed, Kessler asserts that, rather than attempting to change fundamentally biased educational practices, educational programmes in fact aim to change the child and the child's culture, to fit in with the dominant culture.³⁷ These sentiments are echoed by Townsend-Cross who states that the dominant white-Australian education system "depends on 'abducting' children from their ethnic diversity in order to assimilate them into the image of contemporary Australians".³⁸ Should we be trying to change the culture of another group? Kessler refers to such

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; S. Scarr, 'American child care today', *American Psychologist*. 53 (2) (1998), 95 – 108.

³⁵ A. Pence, 'Through the looking glass: Cross-cultural early childhood education', *Every Child*. 7 (1) (2001), 8 – 9, p.8.

³⁶ Dominance here refers to the power and pervasiveness of middle-class ideals. M. L. Gomez, 'Breaking silences: Building new stories of classroom life through teacher transformation', in S. Kessler, & B. B. Swadener (eds.), *Reconceptualizing the Early Childhood Curriculum: Beginning the Dialogue* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 165 – 188.

³⁷ S. Kessler, & B. B. Swadener (eds.), *Reconceptualizing the Early Childhood Curriculum: Beginning the Dialogue* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992).

³⁸ M. Townsend-Cross, 'Respecting children's voices', *Every Child*. 8 (3) (2002), 8 – 9, p.8 [inverted commas in the original].

behaviour as “cultural genocide”, and asserts that “the underlying purpose of compensatory programs ... is fundamentally racist, sexist, and classist”.³⁹ These strong criticisms suggest that, despite being constructed as bringing about social reform, ECEC may in fact be contributing to the perpetuation of dominant ways of being.

But are these criticisms relevant to the NSW context? Of particular influence in Australia of late is the concept of emergent curriculum, as proposed by Jones and Nimmo.⁴⁰ This supposedly culturally and individually appropriate pedagogical approach focuses on following children’s interests and encouraging their prolonged investigation of topics that are of concern to them, rather than a prescribed curriculum and so may address some of those concerns raised above.⁴¹ As MacNaughton points out, however, there is a danger that if we only follow children’s interests, the curriculum may not provide opportunities for them to explore and challenge issues of inequality, such as racism and gender bias.⁴² No curriculum model, especially if interpreted as a ‘model of practice’ or used unreflectively, will by itself challenge social injustice. If socially oppressive practices are to be addressed in ECEC, the field requires politically active and reflective early childhood practitioners.

Writers of the *NSW Curriculum Framework* appear to have tried to address many of the critiques of ECEC discussed above, by developing a curriculum framework that urges ECEC professionals to work reflectively to ensure a responsive curriculum. For instance, the Framework states:

³⁹ Kessler & Swadener, *Reconceptualizing the Early Childhood Curriculum*, p.198.

⁴⁰ E. Jones, & J. Nimmo, *Emergent Curriculum* (Washington, D.C: National Association for Education of Young Children, 1994).

⁴¹ G. MacNaughton, & G. Williams, *Techniques for Teaching Young Children: Choices in Theory and Practice* (2nd ed) (Frenches Forest: Pearson, 2004).

⁴² G. MacNaughton, *Shaping Early Childhood: Learners, Curriculum and Contexts* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003).

The specific aim in this document is that the content of children's experiences should relate to the context of the community, the service and the lives of children.⁴³

This statement suggests awareness of the need to provide socially and culturally appropriate curriculum. One of the most profoundly difficult challenges facing ECEC professionals, however, is how to manage the threefold task of providing responsive, culturally appropriate experiences for children and assisting them to develop the skills necessary to operate effectively in mainstream society, whilst at the same time trying to change oppressive social practices.

Problematizing the Construct of ECEC as Socially Just: Who has Access? Who Gets Saved?

The construction of ECEC as socially just is based on the notion that ECEC institutions:

... promote social justice, access and equity.⁴⁴

Indeed, the *NSW Curriculum Framework* goes so far as to say:

There is now a widely held view in the community that all children should benefit from access to good quality early childhood services prior to formal schooling.⁴⁵

But is there equitable access to ECEC? It appears not. The World Bank declared, for instance:

By the time poor children reach kindergarten age, they already have had an unequal chance to be ready for school or learning. Interventions in early childhood particularly benefit poor and disadvantaged children and families. [but despite this] government funding continues to be very low (often less than 2 percent of the total education budget). Families, communities, and non-government organizations bear major responsibility for early childcare interventions. Lack of funding is a major barrier to access.⁴⁶

⁴³ Office of Childcare, *The Framework Abridged Version*, p.19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.16.

⁴⁵ 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), p.7.

⁴⁶ The World Bank, *Education Notes*.

So despite the construction of ECEC as socially just education, the rhetoric does not appear to be supported by funding. In the Australian context, it may be the most advantaged children who get access to the highest quality care. Elliott, for instance, claims:

Already we see the most affluent communities in the more 'desirable' postcodes with beautifully resourced centres and well qualified early childhood teachers, while poorer and more distant communities are unable to afford or attract qualified staff. ... The real question is what are we prepared to pay to ensure the best early experiences for children and their families.⁴⁷

Her claims seem to be supported by Peter McDonald (Head of Demography and Sociology at the Australian University), who points out that proposed changes to childcare policy in Australia would benefit the wealthiest families:

The policy provides the greatest benefit to those who pay the most for childcare. This would include high-income couples who have a baby in a long day care centre for 50 hours a week and those who use crèches attached to private schools. This is definitely policy for the wealthy and for the big users of care. Indeed, it could lead to the emergence of two tiers of childcare: one for low-income people ... and one for high-income people.⁴⁸

So it seems that despite its intention to assist the most disadvantaged, ECEC is more likely to increase the life chances of those already advantaged by the circumstances of their birth. So can we claim ECEC is socially just?

⁴⁷ A. Elliott, 'Our children a community concern', *Every Child*. 9 (3) (2003), 2.

⁴⁸ P. McDonald, Rebates for the wealthy may be an awful waste of child-care cash, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 September, 2004, p.15. During the Federal election campaign there were numerous articles, opinions pieces and letters to the editor discussing the ECEC funding policies of both major parties.

Problematizing the Construct of ECEC as Socially Just: Teachers are Children's Saviours

Lastly, the construction of ECEC as socially just tends to construct ECEC teachers as children's 'saviours'. For instance, Curtis and Carter, writing for *Every Child*, urge ECEC teachers to think of themselves as:

... guardians of children, rather than just preparing children for the future.⁴⁹

The construct of ECEC as rescuing children is likely to appeal to teachers because it validates their work and gives them positions of power. The teacher becomes "the defender of and fighter for a brighter tomorrow".⁵⁰ Indeed, the *NSW Curriculum Framework* acknowledges the power of teachers stating:

Professionals are in positions of power themselves, and they control the power that parents and children have.⁵¹

Duncan has problematised the construct of the teacher as saviour. She argues:

[The discourse] 'For the Sake of the Children' conjures up images of the teacher / worker who selflessly does what s/he does for the sake of the children rather than for any desire for personal monetary gain or worldly satisfaction. S/he, as the 'ideal' teacher, receives so much pleasure from her / his work with children that s/he neither minds the working conditions or the rate of remuneration, as all satisfaction comes from the growing and developing youngsters in her / his care.⁵²

As Duncan suggests, this dominant construct of teachers as saviours may have contributed to the poor wages and conditions of those working in ECEC settings. A report in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on ECEC workers' claims for a wage increase illustrates how this power operates in practice. It led with the line:

⁴⁹ D. Curtis, & M. Carter, 'Through the eyes of a child', *Every Child*. 9 (3) (2003), 4 – 6, p.4.

⁵⁰ 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, p.164.

⁵¹ Office of Childcare, *The Framework Abridged Version*, p.18.

⁵² Duncan, 'For the sake of the children' as the worth of teacher?, p.163.

Child-care workers will demand pay rises of at least 20 per cent in a move that could make child-care facilities unaffordable for poorer families.⁵³

The report clearly pitches child-care workers' rights to a fair wage against families' needs for affordable childcare. Later in the report Shane Hall, a union representative of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union which represents many childcare workers, was reported as saying:

We want a substantial pay increase but are concerned about the effect it will have on parents trying to pay for childcare.⁵⁴

Concern for others is evident despite his assertion that:

... child-care workers are at the lowest end of the pay scale.⁵⁵

Those working in ECEC continue to bare the burden of a poorly funded system — perhaps because they construct themselves as 'saviours of children', they tend to put the needs of the children and their families above their own needs for a living wage.

To summarise this section, the construction of ECEC as socially just suggests that ECEC contributes both to rescuing children, and to changing inequitable social practices. But, as has been highlighted above, ECEC may uphold dominant power structures that subjugate young children, particularly those from minority groups; differential access to ECEC services may perpetuate social inequity; and the construction of teachers as saviours may contribute to their poor working conditions. The idea of ECEC as socially just education may, then, be hiding underlying oppressive practices. Whether or not ECEC can claim to contribute to social justice may be questionable.

⁵³ M. O'Neill, Fee rise to put childcare beyond the reach of the poor, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 December, 2003, p.22.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p.22.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p.22.

The socially just construct of ECEC has a long history in ECEC. Indeed, Duncan says: “The appeal of this discourse [for the sake of the children] lies in its consistency and compatibility with the kindergarten movement’s historical roots, and its projection of early childhood education’s role in society”.⁵⁶ But what gave rise to this construct? I argue in Chapter Eight that the construct of ECEC as socially just was prevalent at its inception in NSW and emerged within liberal / progressive discourses. The construct of ECEC as socially just tends to focus on improving the life chances of children, whilst the construct of ECEC as national work, to which I turn next, focuses on the benefits of ECEC to the nation.

Construct Five: ECEC as National Work

A further construct of ECEC, and one that is particularly dominant in Australia at present, is that of ECEC as ‘national work’. Here ECEC is constructed in a number of ways as: (i) an investment in the future ‘potential’ of children; (ii) a commercial venture that has benefits for the nation; and (iii) as a means of facilitating workforce participation. In this section, I outline and then go on to problematise each of these constructs.

ECEC as National Work: An Investment in the Future Potential of Children

First and foremost, ECEC is constructed as a national investment for the future prosperity of the nation. Indeed, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in most OECD member countries:

There is a strong link between [early childhood] policy initiatives and economic development agendas.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Duncan, “For the sake of the children’ as the worth of teacher?”, p.164.

⁵⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], *OECD Country Note: Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Australia*, (2001). Accessed on 3 August, 2002, from: <http://www.oecd.org>.

Through the transmission of skills, knowledge and understanding, ECEC is seen to both contribute to the socialisation and preparation of young children, and harness their potential for the needs of society.⁵⁸ For instance, ECEC is constructed as a way of improving later educational achievement and employment prospects. Young, of the World Bank, argues:

[early development programs] can improve primary and even secondary school performance, increase children's prospects for higher productivity and future income.⁵⁹

Similarly, in the Australian context, Elliott says:

Investments in children's early social, emotional and cognitive development have long-term benefits in improved behavioural and academic outcomes that promote success in schools and social environments.⁶⁰

As such, a major aim of ECEC in Australia is to contribute to the socialisation of children and enable them to operate in their social world. Indeed, *The NSW Curriculum Framework* states:

Children's services operate as microcosms of desirable larger communities, where children live with and are supported to adapt values, attitudes and ways of living that will enable them to be effective members of the broader communities in which they live now and will live in the future.⁶¹

Unlike the rescuing of children inherent in the social justice construct, however, the investment construct is firmly tied to national concerns. For instance, The Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing asserts:

It is vital for our future national wellbeing that we do all that is possible to promote their [children's] competence, quality and life skills ...

⁵⁸ Symes & Preston, *Schools and Classrooms*; Weiler, 'Feminism and the struggle for democratic education'.

⁵⁹ Young, *Early Childhood Development*, no page number.

⁶⁰ A. Elliott, 'Building capacity and strengthening early childhood provision', *Every Child*. 10 (2) (2004), 2.

⁶¹ Office of Childcare, *The NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services*, p.17.

supporting children in their early years can yield lasting benefits — for the children themselves, for their families and for society as a whole.⁶²

This construct seems to have emerged within nationalist discourses. An increasingly globalised market has heightened fears about Australia's capacity to compete in the global economy.⁶³ Many economists argue that Australia needs a competent, innovative, flexible, and highly skilled workforce. This necessitates investment in the development of Australia's 'human capital' through programs such as ECEC.⁶⁴

Similarly, ECEC is constructed as benefiting the nation by its supposed capacity to reduce anti-social and delinquent behaviour and thereby potentially save the future cost of a deviant population.⁶⁵ For example, Young claims:

Early investment in children can reduce the need for public welfare expenditure later and cut down on the social and financial costs associated with grade repetition, juvenile delinquency, and drug use.⁶⁶

In so doing, it could be argued that a goal of ECEC is to 'produce' compliant, productive members of society.

Clearly, the construct of ECEC as an investment is built largely on economic imperatives.⁶⁷ Indeed, Vandenbroeck sees "the economic function of childcare as the

⁶² Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing, *Consultation Paper: Towards the Development of a National Agenda for Early Childhood* (ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). Accessed on 27 May, 2005, from: <http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/minister2.nsf/content/earlychildhood.htm>, p.2 & p.3.

⁶³ E. Cox, 'The companionable state': Boyer Lecture 4: A truly civil society, 1995. Accessed on 24 June, 2005, from: <http://www.ldb.org/boyerl4.htm>.

⁶⁴ F. Argy, 'Australia at the crossroads: Radical free market or progressive liberalism?: Key issues and conclusions', *The Australian Economic Review*. 31 (4) (1998), 373 – 383; C. T. Bathala, & A. R. Korukonda, 'Social performance of free markets: Issues, analysis and appraisal', *International Journal of Social Economics*. 30 (8) (2003), 854 – 866; D. Bryan, 'Australian economic nationalism: Old and new', *Australian Economic Papers*. 30 (57) (1991), 290 – 309, p.293.

⁶⁵ 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).

⁶⁶ Young, 'Early Childhood Development', no page number.

⁶⁷ OECD, *OECD Country Note*.

dominant paradigm”.⁶⁸ That is, in investment terms, ECEC ‘adds value’ to children.

Such sentiments are plainly evident in the following statement by Young:

Investment in education associated with early stimulation and sensory-motor readiness yields a far higher rate of return than does equal investment in secondary or higher education In the High/Scope Perry preschool Program initiated in 1962, for instance, an investment of US\$1.00 was estimated to yield US\$7.16 in savings from lower education and welfare expenditure combined with gains in productivity.⁶⁹

Similar statements are also evident in the Australian context. For instance, the National

Agenda for Early Childhood states:

There is also a basis for thinking of this [concern with children] in investment terms. For example, US studies have suggested that there are substantial savings to be made over the longer term from prevention and early intervention programs in early childhood.⁷⁰

As such, the construct of ECEC as an investment designates children as resources. This idea is reflected in Stanley’s statement:

Investing in our children will bring life long dividend.⁷¹

Likewise, Larry Anthony, whilst Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, in the foreword of the National Agenda consultation paper, asked:

Are we as a nation valuing our most precious resource — our children?⁷²

But as well as being constructed as an investment in the future of children, and a means of reducing future costs, ECEC is also constructed as a commercial venture that benefits the nation.

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ Young, *Early Childhood Development*, no page number.

⁷⁰ Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing, *Consultation Paper*, p.1.

⁷¹ Stanley, ‘The Australian of the Year speaks out for children’, p.3.

⁷² Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing, *Consultation Paper*, p.iii.

ECEC as National Work: A Commercial Venture that Benefits the Nation

As I stated in Chapter Three, access to ECEC is not considered a right in NSW, and Government is not compelled to provide ECEC. In the past, ECEC has been provided by non-profit organisations or small private operators and has been subsidised by Government. Today, however, within market economy discourses, the provision of public services, including ECEC, has increasingly moved away from the State, in what Hayden refers to as a “shift towards market economy”.⁷³

Governments have encouraged private investment in ECEC and entrepreneurs have moved in to exploit the market.⁷⁴ Particularly noticeable, is the recent entry into the ECEC field of corporate childcare.⁷⁵ Sumsion defines the corporatisation of childcare as “the rapid expansion and escalating market share of childcare services owned and / or operated for profit by public companies listed on the Australian stock exchange”.⁷⁶ These corporations have obligations to comply with the financial compliance and disclosure requirements of the Australian Securities and Investment Commission.⁷⁷

In 2004, Brennan predicted that:

... corporate child care chains intend to grow rapidly. ABC Learning [the largest corporate child care player in Australia] wrote to all community-based and non-profit services in NSW, offering to take them over. ... [employing] an ‘aggressive acquisition strategy’.⁷⁸

⁷³ J. Hayden (ed.), *Landscapes in Early Childhood Education: Cross-National Perspectives on Empowerment – a Guide for the New Millennium* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), p.19. Argy, ‘Australia at the crossroads’.

⁷⁴ 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.

⁷⁵ Press & Woodrow, ‘Commodification, corporatisation and children’s spaces’, p.280; J. Sumsion, ‘The corporatization of Australian childcare: Towards an ethical audit and research agenda’, *Early Childhood Research Journal*. (forthcoming).

⁷⁶ Sumsion, ‘The corporatization of Australian childcare’.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Brennan, ‘Child care and Australian social policy’ p. 219.

Her predictions have proven accurate. There are currently four child-care centre operators listed on the Australian stock exchange.⁷⁹ Of these four, ABC Learning is the world's largest listed childcare provider with childcare centres in Australia, New Zealand and most recently the United States.⁸⁰ It is estimated to have approximately 25 per cent of the childcare 'market' in Australia.⁸¹

Given the current market economy, without privately operated and corporate childcare services, such as ABC Learning, it is unlikely there would be sufficient childcare places to meet the needs of the workforce, possibly to the detriment of national economic growth. The entry of corporate providers into the ECEC field, with their focus on shareholder returns, has, however, heralded a major change in the landscape of ECEC in Australia.⁸² In ways unprecedented, ECEC is now constructed as a commercial venture and there are numerous reports about the growth of 'childcare' in the financial pages of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. The following statement is typical of these reports:

If only profitable investing was as easy as child's play. In fact, many analysts predict solid growth and returns could be as simple as ABC — by investing in the child-care sector. ... child-care centre operators ... have a reputation for strong share price returns and good revenue growth

⁷⁹ R. Barnes, Demand makes child care a strong growth sector, *Sun-Herald*, 8 May, 2005, p.12.

⁸⁰ S. Rochfort, ABC Learning big on US littlies, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 November, 2005, p.21. A.B.C. Learning Centres Limited (A.B.C.) was listed on the Australian Stock Exchange in March, 2001 (A.B.C. Learning Centre 'Media Statement'. Accessed on 9 June 2005, from: A.B.C. Learning Centre website:

<http://www.childcare.com.au/images/2005%20documents/ABC%20Half%20Yr%20Results%20Ann.pdf>.

⁸¹ ABC declared a net profit of \$52.34 million for 2004-2005. It owns approximately 680 childcare centres in Australia and New Zealand and has recently purchased the third largest child care group in the United States (C. Herde, Fattened ABC calls halt to acquisitions, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 August, 2005, p.25; F. Leyden, ABC Learning: King of Kids, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 September, 2004, p.23; Rochfort, ABC Learning big on US littlies). ABC Learning, through one of its subsidiaries, is also planning to move into primary and secondary school education (J. Norrie, The baby boom that crept up on us and look who has an eye on their schooling, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 December, 2005, 2005, p.1 & p.8.)

⁸² Brennan, 'Child care and Australian social policy'.

... ABC is the best options for the risk-averse. ... the company has been an excellent performer, with good quality management and returns.⁸³

It is hard to see where children fit into this discourse.

ECEC as National Work: Facilitating Workforce Participation

The provision of work-related childcare to support parental employment is recognised as one of the primary purposes of ECEC.⁸⁴ Overwhelmingly, in media reports ECEC is referred to as 'childcare', and the discussion principally centres on the role of ECEC in providing work-related childcare, and the associated costs to parents of purchasing care and Governments in supporting childcare.⁸⁵ An example of these reports is:

The Government already spends \$1.5 billion subsidising child care through the child-care benefit. There are nearly 3 million working parents of young children and 800,000 children in child care. ... the Coalition [Liberal / National political party alliance] promised to spend another \$1 billion to cover 30 per cent of parents' child-care expenses.⁸⁶

Although commonly, responsibility for the care and education of young children is regarded as principally residing with the family, social and demographic changes in Australian society, referred to previously, have resulted in an increase in the demand for childcare places.⁸⁷ In the current Australian economic climate, many families with young children require a dual income to survive, necessitating their access to some form of childcare.⁸⁸ Traditionally, childcare would have been provided by local support

⁸³ Barnes, Demand makes child care a strong growth sector. See also Herde, Fattened ABC calls halt to acquisitions; Rochfort, ABC Learning big on US littlies; Leyden, ABC Learning: King of Kids.

⁸⁴ Scarr, 'American child care today'; Barnett, 'Developing preschool education policy'.

⁸⁵ See for example: D. Teutsch, Career women who go out to work for virtually nothing, *The Sun-Herald*, 23 October, 2005, pp.10 – 11; A. Clark, & S. Peatling, \$100 a day — the child care dilemma, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 – 2 October, 2005, p.1.

⁸⁶ C. Marriner, Don't make me scream, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 November, 2004, p.11.

⁸⁷ Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), *2004 Census of Childcare* (Australian Capital Territory, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). Accessed on 25 July 25, 2005 from: http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/childcare/04_census.htm.

⁸⁸ D. Fraser, 'Children's services: A vision for the future', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 25 (1) (2000), 1 – 7.

networks.⁸⁹ But in contemporary society, these informal networks may not be available to families. For instance, women's increasing participation in the workforce may mean that female friends and relatives, who have often, in the past, provided informal childcare, are no longer available.⁹⁰ Furthermore, contemporary Australian society is highly mobile, with a large migrant population. These factors may limit families' opportunities to develop local support networks.⁹¹ Consequently, ECEC plays an increasingly important role providing work-related care.

Moreover, work-related childcare has potential economic benefits for the nation. It not only increases the pool of available labour on which the market can draw, but also assists families to earn income, thereby reducing their reliance on welfare.⁹² As such, parental workforce participation is a requirement for priority of access to childcare in Australia.⁹³

ECEC, then, is constructed as national work in several ways: it is an investment in the future potential of children; it is an economic venture that benefits the nation; and it facilitates workforce participation. Further, the construction of ECEC as national work seems to be profoundly influenced by economic and nationalistic discourses. The construction of ECEC within these discourses is useful for ECEC advocates, because it is a language that those with power over the provision of ECEC, that is government, are familiar and comfortable. As such, the construction of ECEC in these terms is likely to

⁸⁹ A. Burbridge, 'Changing patterns of social exchanges: Issues in the literature', *Family Matters*. (50) (1998), 10 – 18.

⁹⁰ Fraser, 'Children's services'.

⁹¹ I. Winter, 'Social exchanges: Families, communities, states and markets', *Family Matters*. (50) (1998), 5 – 8.

⁹² Scarr, 'American child care today'; Barnett, 'Developing preschool education policy'.

⁹³ FaCS, *Priority for allocating places in child care services*.

be more readily understood and accepted by government. But the construction of ECEC as national work is also highly problematic.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as National Work

Below I raise a number of concerns with constructs of ECEC as national work. First, I problematise the ways these constructs objectify children as resources. Second, I suggest that using economic arguments to advocate ECEC may be a flawed strategy. Third, I contend that the construction of ECEC as a commodity threatens the quality of ECEC, and that a reliance on competitive market economic discourses is insufficient to ensure quality. Fourth, I argue that the competition engendered by economic discourses could be detrimental for ECEC and its capacity to promote civic engagement. Finally, I argue that the role of ECEC as facilitating workforce participation may limit the possibilities of ECEC.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Benefiting the Nation: Constructing Children as Resources

Several writers have problematised the investment construct of ECEC that views children as resources. Hauser and Jipson, along with Cannella, for instance, argue that viewing children as resources objectifies them as economic entities, mere investments for the future.⁹⁴ Similarly, Anijar contends that children tend to be valued not for who they are but for their potential to become 'productive citizens'.⁹⁵ Polokow agrees

⁹⁴ Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*; M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / Early Childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).

⁹⁵ K. Anijar, 'Childhood and caring: A capitalist taxonomy of Mar(x)ket place', in M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / Early Childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 283 – 299.

saying, within these constructs children “matter instrumentally, not existentially”.⁹⁶ In a like manner, Woodrow and Brennan refer to children being constructed as “embryo adults”:

Children are seen as the raw material from which will be shaped the socially acceptable adult, and childhood as a time of preparation for ‘life’. This statement, ‘preparation for life’ seems to suggest that childhood is not life.⁹⁷

These writers, whilst alerting us to the problem of constructing children as resources do, however, seem to set up a binary opposition — that children can be valued either in the here and now or for their future potential. But, from a social constructionist perspective, it is possible to value children both for their current being and their future potential. Indeed the *NSW Curriculum Framework* document states quite categorically that within that framework:

Children are valued as citizens in their own right and not just for future potential.⁹⁸

Moreover, the document goes on to state:

The conceptualisation of children’s services as learning communities places children solidly in the community, as current citizens. Investment is made in children’s learning and lives because they matter in the present, rather than likely future benefits. At the same time their learning is assumed to be a foundation for the rest of their life. A child’s experiences are both life and preparation for life.⁹⁹

The document seems to be embracing both presentist and futurist positions.

Some also argue that viewing children as resources results in particular forms of ECEC.

Cannella asserts, for instance, that seeing children as resources creates practices of

⁹⁶ V. Polakow, ‘Deconstructing the discourse of care: Young children in the shadows of democracy’, in S. Kessler, & B.B. Swadener (eds.), *Reconceptualizing the Early Childhood Curriculum: Beginning the Dialogue* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 123 – 148, p.14.

⁹⁷ 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, p.29 [inverted commas in the original].

⁹⁸ Office of Childcare. *The NSW Curriculum Framework for Children’s Services*, p.1.

⁹⁹ Office of Childcare, *The Framework Abridged Version*, p.17.

ECEC which discipline children to be compliant to authority.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Bailey suggests that children are constructed as “burdens to be kept out of the way, socialized, and acculturated in bureaucratic institutions”.¹⁰¹ According to Symes and Preston, such an instrumental view of education “is deficient in normative terms because it promotes a narrow utilitarian approach to persons and human knowledge”.¹⁰² This view suggests that only those children who are potentially productive, or of material benefit to society are of value, and that only knowledge considered useful for children’s future contribution to society is worthwhile.¹⁰³ Likewise, Gammage cautions that we should not view children as “economic capital. Indeed, to view them solely as that demeans the notion of childhood, devalues any concept of human development, and dangerously plays into the hands of instrumental, ‘ends justify means’ approaches to childhood”.¹⁰⁴ As these arguments seem to suggest, viewing children as resources may result in narrowly focused ECEC.

The construction of children as resources also upholds the focus on the individual, problematised in Chapter Three. The development of the individual child becomes enmeshed with the well-being of the nation.¹⁰⁵ As Rose puts it:

No longer is there conflict between the self-interest of the economic subject and the patriotic duty of the citizen: it now appears that one can fulfil one’s obligation to one’s nation by most effectively pursuing the enhancement of the economic well-being of oneself, one’s family, one’s firm, business or organization.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*.

¹⁰¹ C. Bailey, ‘Writing home: Stories of a feminist self’, in M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / Early Childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 37 – 47, p.46.

¹⁰² Symes & Preston, *Schools and Classrooms*, p.68.

¹⁰³ M. W. Apple, ‘Comparing neo-liberal projects and equality in education’, *Comparative Education*. 37 (4) (2001), 409 – 423, p.413.

¹⁰⁴ Gammage, ‘Early childhood education and care’, p.42.

¹⁰⁵ N. Rose, ‘Governing “advanced” liberal democracies’, in A. Barry, T. Osbourne, & N. Rose (eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 37 – 64; N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing political thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, p.145.

Whether or not the national prosperity to which the individual contributes is fairly and equally distributed, though, is open to debate.

It must be acknowledged, however, that the construction of children as resources may be beneficial for ECEC by drawing attention to the needs of children (even if they are narrowly defined) and providing the ECEC field with an opportunity to advocate for ECEC services. Perhaps framing ECEC within the prevailing dominant economic discourses will lead to more successful advocacy. But the construction of children in this way comes at a price.

Problematizing the Construct of ECEC as Benefiting the Nation: Using Economic Arguments to Advocate ECEC

Using economic arguments to advocate ECEC, although powerful, may be a flawed strategy. First, it could lead to an ethos of minimal input for maximum output. If it were found that to invest \$1 saves \$5 later, but to invest \$2 yields no greater return, then why invest at the higher level? Furthermore, what happens if future research reveals that investment in ECEC has minimal or no economic benefits for society? On what basis do we then argue for ECEC?

Second, the idea of investing in the early years does not necessarily uphold existing ECEC structures. For instance, the World Bank suggests that home visiting may be more cost effective than centre-based care.

Often, policymakers equate early intervention with formal, center-based programs, which are not affordable or universally accessible to all children. However, options include non-formal early childhood programs, which are flexible and less expensive to administer than formal kindergarten. ... Properly targeted, non-formal ECD programs

can yield returns as great as, or greater than, those from formal preschools.¹⁰⁷

Consequently, the 'investment' construct of ECEC could work against centre-based ECEC and may be disadvantageous for the ECEC field.

Finally, claims about the potential benefit of ECEC in reducing the costs associated with crime may be overstated. In his comparison of the provision of early childhood in the United States in the 1820s – 30s and the contemporary early childhood program, Head Start, Vinovskis provides a cautionary tale. He found that ECEC has often been seen as a way of "eliminating crime and poverty".¹⁰⁸ However, he states that the over-reliance on such a construct can result in "disillusionment ... [as we] observe the tendency in our society to exaggerate the beneficial aspects of new programs and then become discouraged when the actual results do not meet our unrealistic, initial expectations".¹⁰⁹ So using such economic arguments to advocate ECEC may be unwise.

Problematizing the Construct of ECEC as Benefiting the Nation: Constructing ECEC as a Commodity.

As highlighted above there has been a momentous shift towards privatisation and corporatisation of ECEC in NSW. Press and Woodrow claim that the growth of commercial ECEC is "a result of deliberate policy interventions".¹¹⁰ Similarly, Sumsion asserts:

The emphasis on the primacy of market forces in childcare provision reflects the Australian Government's neoliberal stance and commitment

¹⁰⁷ World Bank, *Education Notes* [abbreviation ECD, early childhood development, used in original].

¹⁰⁸ M. A. Vinovskis, 'Early Childhood Education: Then and Now', *Daedalus*. 122 (1) (1993), 151 – 177, p.152.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ F. Press, & C. Woodrow, 'Commodification, corporatisation and children's spaces', *Australian Journal of Education*. 49 (3) (2005), 278 – 291.

to consumer choice, competitiveness, profit maximization, and a downsizing of government's role in favour of private sector expansion as the bases for policy decisions. Policy-making seems predicated on the assumption that privatization will enhance the efficiency of childcare provision.¹¹¹

Within these economic market discourses, the everyday operations of ECEC services are likely to be driven by commercial considerations, such as cost, expenditure, income and competition. Attention to these business aspects is essential for well-managed services. But it could also have repercussions for the quality of care in ECEC.

Anecdotally, many ECEC advocates express concern that for-profit ECEC services are of poorer quality than non-profit ECEC services.¹¹² The basis of these concerns is that whereas non-profit ECEC services are typically founded on social interest concerns, rather than profit-making, and any profits derived are invested back into the service, commercial for-profit ECEC services are driven by economic considerations and profits are passed on to the owner or shareholders.¹¹³ With this focus on profits, expenses such as operating costs and wages tend to be constructed as 'risks', and educational principles may be compromised, possibly reducing the quality in ECEC services at the expense of children's wellbeing and working conditions of ECEC staff.¹¹⁴

The increased commercialisation of ECEC is particularly worrying considering the rapid growth of Australian corporate childcare discussed previously. According to Press and Brennan, the neo-liberal discourses on which current ECEC is based suppose that

¹¹¹ Sumsion, 'The corporatization of Australian childcare'.

¹¹² C. Cleveland, & M. Krashinsky, 'The non-profit advantage: Producing quality in thick and thin child care markets'. Accessed on 5 December, 2005 from: <http://childcarepolicy.net/pdt/non-profitadvantage.pdf>; Sumsion, 'The corporatization of Australian childcare'.

¹¹³ Cleveland & Krashinsky, 'The non-profit advantage'.

¹¹⁴ Apple, 'Comparing neo-liberal projects and equality in education'; Cleveland & Krashinsky, 'The non-profit advantage'; J. Hayden, 'Half full or half empty? Child care policy and the missing bits', in E. J. Mellor, & K. M. Coombe (eds.), *Issues in early childhood services* (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, 1994), 11 – 23; Lero, 'Early childhood education'.

“state-regulated mechanisms ... [can] respond appropriately to community needs for infrastructure and services”.¹¹⁵ But childcare corporations constitute a powerful lobby group, and there are concerns that state-regulation mechanisms will be challenged.¹¹⁶ Indeed, Brennan contends that: “Pressures to reduce licensing standards and to move away from the current system of accreditation towards industry self-regulation have intensified”.¹¹⁷ It is possible that corporate childcare, with its increasing market share, could utilise market economy discourses to petition for a freer market with fewer legislative requirements and regulations.

In addition, the size of corporate childcare, such as ABC Learning means ECEC is a very uneven playing field. For instance, whilst all services are subject to the same legislative requirements to meet minimum standards of care, larger corporations are at a distinct financial advantage because they can spread out the cost of compliance.¹¹⁸ Further, the sheer size of ABC Learning has given it increased market power enabling it to employ some dubious marketing strategies, such as offering parents lines of credit to defer payment of childcare fees.¹¹⁹

Notwithstanding the concerns raised above, liberal economists argue that in a competitive market economy, the market acts as regulator and controls quality.¹²⁰ From this perspective, those ECEC services offering the best value for money will prosper where others will fade. But recently there have been concerns raised about the appropriateness of applying such market arguments to ECEC. Firstly, market forces can

¹¹⁵ Press & Woodrow, ‘Commodification, corporatisation and children’s spaces’, p.283.

¹¹⁶ Sumsion, ‘The corporatization of Australian childcare’.

¹¹⁷ Brennan, ‘Child care and Australian social policy’.

¹¹⁸ Sumsion, ‘The corporatization of Australian childcare’

¹¹⁹ D. Cullen, Early learning, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August, 2005, p.6.

¹²⁰ Argy, ‘Australia at the crossroads’.

only operate when there is competition. In areas where there are few services, as is the case in many geographical areas in NSW where there are too few ECEC services to meet demands, especially in the birth to three years age range, consumer choice is illusory.¹²¹ Second, competition can only be realised when there are consumers who have the economic means to purchase the commodity. Despite government subsidies, ECEC is costly and beyond the economic means of many parents.¹²² Third, the purchase of quality care is dependent upon consumers' awareness. Parents' may have neither the knowledge nor experience to determine what constitutes quality in childcare.¹²³

Moreover, Cleveland and Krashinsky's work calls into question the capacity of market forces to control quality in ECEC.¹²⁴ They highlight how the type of market within which services operate has profound effects on quality. They acknowledge that "thick markets", those with high consumer demand, increase competition, and therefore tend to increase quality. But they also argue that "thin markets", those with fewer consumers, tend to constrain quality, as, in a bid to capture their market share, services compete to provide the most affordable care. Cleveland and Krashinsky contend that ECEC operates in a thin market that is not "classically competitive".¹²⁵ They point out that parents of young children only constitute a small proportion of the population, and the numbers seeking childcare are further reduced because many prefer to turn to family and friends rather than formal care. In addition, the high cost of ECEC may prohibit many parents from accessing childcare further reducing the demand. Also, the market

¹²¹ FaCS, *2004 Census of Childcare*.

¹²² The cost of childcare was reported as being as high as \$105 a day in some Sydney ECEC services. A. Clarke, No expense spared on Byron's preschool, 1 – 2 October, 2005, p.6; S. Peatling, Child-care benefit catches out 32,000 families, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 October, 2005, p.5; Clark & Peatling, \$100 a day — the child care dilemma;

¹²³ Press & Woodrow, 'Commodification, corporatisation and children's spaces'.

¹²⁴ Cleveland & Krashinsky, 'The non-profit advantage, unnumbered.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

for an ECEC service tends to be from its surrounding local area and so is geographically limited.

Given these concerns, it is unlikely that market forces by themselves would regulate access to, or quality of, ECEC services in NSW. As such, it is essential that minimum standards are maintained or improved by legislation. The well-being of children is too important to be left to the vagaries of 'the market'.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Benefiting the Nation: ECEC in Competition

The construction of ECEC within economic discourses creates a highly competitive environment in which ECEC is constructed as a commodity to be packaged, advertised, bought and sold. This competition could be deeply divisive, as in a competitive, market driven world, with increasing accountability to shareholders, ECEC services are pitted one against the other in attempts to increase their market share.

The competitive environment of ECEC could also have repercussions for how children are 'measured' and 'monitored'. As Press and Woodrow point out, even though it is children who are the consumers of ECEC, it is parents who are typically the purchasers.¹²⁶ Parents' choices of ECEC are likely to be determined by accessibility, affordability and the perceived quality of an ECEC service. One of the ways ECEC services may choose to make the quality of their care visible, is to show how they 'add value' to children. To this end, measurements of children's development become the focus of attention, rather than their everyday engagement with the world, igniting what

¹²⁶ Press & Woodrow, 'Commodification, corporatisation and children's spaces'.

Rose refers to as an “audit explosion”.¹²⁷ It may not be long before we see the establishment of a ‘league table’ of ECEC services, or children’s ‘performances’ used to ‘sell’ a particular service.

Moreover, within this competition discourse, children who are outside of the ‘norm’, for instance, those with special needs, may be constructed as not only expensive to accommodate, but also a potential threat to the overall ‘score’ of the ECEC setting. Apple cautions, educational settings “that wish to maintain or enhance their market position may engage in ‘cream-skimming’, ensuring that *particular* kinds of students with particular characteristics are accepted and particular kinds of students are found wanting”.¹²⁸ Indeed, Apple argues that in schools there has been “a subtle, but crucial shift in emphasis ... from student needs to student performance and from what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school”.¹²⁹

Troublingly, Press and Woodrow argue that in the current Australian ECEC market, children with additional care needs, such as those under two years of age and those with disabilities, for whom care incurs increased costs, find it difficult to obtain childcare places, especially in for-profit services.¹³⁰ In a process that they refer to as “residualisation”, Press and Woodrow contend that it is typically the non-profit sector that ‘picks up’ the care for these children. As a result, we may end up with two very different clienteles in each service-type.¹³¹ It is difficult to see how a notion of inclusion can be upheld under such circumstances. Regrettably, as I have identified in Chapter

¹²⁷ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, p.153.

¹²⁸ *ibid*, p.417 [italics in the original].

¹²⁹ Apple, ‘Comparing neo-liberal projects and equality in education’, p.413.

¹³⁰ Press & Woodrow, ‘Commodification, corporatisation and children’s spaces’, p.284.

¹³¹ *ibid*.

Three, the vetting of children entering ECEC services may already be happening in NSW.

The rise of commercialised childcare may also diminish the potential for civic engagement afforded by collective community care. As Keary states: "Social kinships of collective childcare and responsibility have been erased and reconstituted in economic exchanges of paid childcare".¹³² With a focus on individual consumer satisfaction, it may be difficult for teachers to engage with potentially challenging socially progressive curriculum choices, such as those advocated earlier in the chapter, especially in the face of parent opposition.¹³³ Moreover, Sumsion contends that in a quest to uphold a 'corporate identity', corporate ECEC may be prone to uniformity across the services owned, resulting in homogeneity and a decrease in the ability of individual services to respond to local level differences.¹³⁴ In addition, with the centralisation associated with corporations, teacher autonomy in pedagogical and curriculum decision-making may be reduced. Indeed, the images of ECEC services portrayed in advertisements which aim to entice 'customers' to buy their 'product', mitigate against constructions of ECEC as spaces for resistance and challenge.¹³⁵ Woodrow and Press, for instance, found that such marketing employed homogenous images of primarily 'Anglo' children, engaged in safe, pleasant experiences designed to assist their development.¹³⁶ Such images, whilst no doubt reassuring to parents, do little to construct ECEC as a places for children's active civic engagement.

¹³² A. Keary, 'Changing images of mother / mothering', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. 25 (2) (2000), 13 – 17, p.16.

¹³³ Press & Woodrow, 'Commodification, corporatisation and children's spaces'.

¹³⁴ Sumsion, 'The corporatization of Australian childcare'

¹³⁵ Moss, P., & Petrie, P., *From Children's Services to Children's Spaces: Public Policy, Children and Childhood* (London: Routledge / Falmer, 2002).

¹³⁶ Press & Woodrow, 'Commodification, corporatisation and children's spaces'.

It is difficult to reconcile the construct of ECEC as a commodity with a social justice approach. Higher quality services, those with a low staff to children ratio, more highly qualified staff and necessary materials and resources are the most likely to provide positive benefits for children.¹³⁷ Such services are expensive to operate. As Jonathon Kruger, executive director of Childcare Associations Australia, was reported as saying in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

Unfortunately, quality costs. When you're talking about having children engaged, happy and wanting to go to child care — these things cost money.¹³⁸

As the commercialisation of ECEC is based on a 'user pays' model, it is likely that higher quality ECEC services will be available predominantly to those already advantaged by wealth. Conversely, children from backgrounds of socio-economic deprivation, whose parents are unable to afford the highest quality ECEC, will be doubly disadvantaged.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Benefiting the Nation: Constructing ECEC as Facilitating Workforce Participation

The construct of ECEC as assisting workforce participation is also problematic as it puts the needs of the employment market above those of children. From this perspective, any care which is convenient, affordable, and accessible might be considered appropriate and could lead to ad-hoc childcare arrangements being made. Several such ad-hoc arrangements were reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*: One

¹³⁷ J. M. Love, L. Harrison, A. Sagi-Schwartz, M. H. van Ijzendoorn, C. Ross, J. A. Ungerer, H. Raikes, C. Brady-Smith, K. Boller, J. Brookes-Gunn, J. Constantine, E. E. Kisker, D. Paulsell, & R. Chazan-Cohen, 'Child care quality matters: How conclusions may vary with context', *Child Development*. 74 (4) (2003), 1021-1033; E. E. Maccoby, & C. C. Lewis, 'Less day care or different day care? *Child Development*. 74 (1) (2003), 1069 – 1075; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 'Characteristics and quality of child care for toddlers and preschoolers', *Applied Developmental Science*. 4 (3) (2000), 116-125.

¹³⁸ Clark & Peatling, \$100 a day — the child care dilemma.

service was an on-site child-minding room at the parent's place of work, a hairdressing salon, another service, a mobile nanny to cater for the emergency after hours childcare needs of barristers.¹³⁹ More recently, with a shortage of available childcare places, there have been reports of an increase in parents' use of untrained nannies.¹⁴⁰ And a number of controversial strategies to 'fix' the shortage of childcare places have been suggested by the former Minister for Family and Community Services, Kay Paterson, including training lone-mothers to become family day care providers and:

... utilising space in vacant under-used buildings to establish long day care centres.¹⁴¹

Whether these childcare arrangements are in the best interests of children is questionable.¹⁴²

Moreover, the dominance of the construct of ECEC as assisting workforce participation may limit the ways in which ECEC is constructed. Moss, for instance, argues:

The constant use of terms like 'childcare' and 'children's services' — linked to a narrow idea of 'childcare for working parents' — inhibits the conceptualization and realization of early childhood services as complex and inclusive institutions offering a wide range of possibilities for *all* children and parents (whether employed or not).¹⁴³

According to Moss, the construct of ECEC as supporting workforce participation is a narrow conceptualisation that is perhaps excluding some children and limiting the potential of ECEC. Although, as has been demonstrated throughout Chapters Three and

¹³⁹ A. Knight, Yes, Mum, I think chestnut with highlights is pretty cool, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Weekend Edition – News, 25 – 26, September, 2004, p.15; B. Delaney, 2004, Pardon me, your honour, I'm off to check on the kids, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 May, p.1 & p.7.

¹⁴⁰ D. Deutsch, \$6bn black market in nannies, *The Sun-Herald*, 30 October, 2005, p.5.

¹⁴¹ K-A., Walsh, Office nannies to mind children, *The Sun-Herald*, 23 October, 2005, p.1 & p.11; A. Horin, Lone parent solution to child-care shortage, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 October, 2005, p.5; S. Peatling, Back bench forces child care change, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 November, 2005, p.5;

¹⁴² L. Rushworth, Quality care paramount, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December, 2005, p.14; M. Wade, & M. Seccombe, Child-care ideas raises suspicion, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 October, 2005, p.7.

¹⁴³ 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, p.37 [emphasis and inverted commas in the original].

Four, multiple constructs of ECEC can exist simultaneously — so such concerns may be unwarranted.

To summarise this section, ECEC is constructed as national work in several ways as: an investment in the future potential of children; a commercial venture that benefits the nation; and work-related childcare. These constructs, however, are problematic: children are viewed as resources; the economic arguments on which they are based are possibly flawed; the commoditisation of ECEC may have detrimental consequences for quality; the competitive aspects may lead to increased monitoring of children and diminish capacity for engaging with social justice issues; and the construction of ECEC as work-related care may be limiting. Yet, despite the concerns raised above, in an economic rationalist environment, the construct of ECEC as beneficial for the nation is a pragmatic and possibly inevitable construct. It means that ECEC is accountable to the wider society and requires early childhood educators to justify their practices. However, if ECEC professionals choose to contribute to the construct of ECEC as having economic benefits for society, then they must think critically about the repercussions of this choice.

How did the dominant construct of ECEC as benefiting the nation emerge? In Chapter Nine, I show that from its earliest days, ECEC in NSW was framed within economic and nationalist discourses as national work, indicating it is a powerful and enduring construct that is resistant to change.

Construct Six: ECEC as Women's Work

The last construct I have identified in the contemporary texts is that of ECEC as 'women's work'. ECEC is constructed as women's work both in terms of being work done *by* women and work done *for* women. The construct of ECEC as work done by women is evident in the fact that the majority of those involved in ECEC are women.¹⁴⁴

But also the language used by writers in the media tends to be biased towards women.

For instance, Stevenson wrote in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

[children in childcare play] under the present, watchful, and loving eye of a dedicated batch of women whose career is to hold the hands of young people as they take their first steps on a long path.¹⁴⁵

Indeed, it was explicitly stated by Jim Llyod (NSW President of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union) in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that:

Society has seen the kind of work that's done by child-care workers as 'women's work' and historically women's work has not been remunerated as well as the work that is generally done by men.¹⁴⁶

Reinforcing the dominance of women in the ECEC workforce are the images of predominantly female ECEC professionals portrayed in the press that continue to naturalise the association between women and ECEC.¹⁴⁷

The construct of ECEC as work done *for* women is especially dominant. Media commentary about policies, research or issues related to ECEC are invariably linked to women, or more specifically mothers. For instance, two newspaper reports in *The Sydney Morning Herald* discussing changes in childcare funding arrangements, explicitly stated this was a women's issue:

¹⁴⁴ De Lair & Erwin, 'Working perspectives within feminism and early childhood education'.

¹⁴⁵ A. Stevenson, A few lessons for mum and dad, too at child care, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December, 2005, p.15..

¹⁴⁶ D. Welch, Burden of child care, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 – 31 July, 2005, p.27.

¹⁴⁷ See for instance, Love the job not the pay, *The Sun-Herald*, 26 October, 2003, p.30; N. O'Malley, Child-care workers' hopes of a pay rise tick-tocking away, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 – 27 November, 2005, 2005, p.8; O'Neill, 'Fee rise to put childcare beyond the reach of the poor';

The battle for mums' vote is on.¹⁴⁸

And:

A win for mothers who go out to work.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, a report discussing research on the effects of childcare on children led with the header:

While researchers argue about the effects of day care, working mothers struggle with guilt.¹⁵⁰

That it is mothers who are presumed to have feelings of 'guilt', as apposed to parents, reinforces the 'naturalness' of maternal responsibility for childcare.

As Moss asserts, ECEC is constructed as necessary for women's participation in the workforce: "The narrow, instrumental and dominant understanding is that 'childcare' is a necessary condition for mothers to undertake paid work."¹⁵¹ Work-related childcare is particularly important for supporting maternal employment, and assisting mothers to become financially independent and secure, because the availability, or otherwise, of affordable, accessible, reliable childcare has a more profound effect on mothers' workforce participation than fathers.¹⁵²

Underpinning the seemingly natural link made between women and the care and education of young children is an essentialist view of womanhood.¹⁵³ Essentialist discourses maintain that biological differences between men and women result in

¹⁴⁸ L. Martin, & J. Scott, Childcare centre stage as funds roll out, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December, 2003, p.4.

¹⁴⁹ R. A. Gittins, A win for mothers who go out to work, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October, 2004, p.17. See also D. Teutsch, Career women who go out to work for virtually nothing, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October, 2005, p.10.

¹⁵⁰ K. Burke, Listen to the children, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 February, 2004, p.13.

¹⁵¹ Moss, 'Getting beyond childcare', p.37.

¹⁵² Lero, 'Early childhood education'.

¹⁵³ L. Goldstein, 'The distance between feminism and early childhood education: An historical perspective', in M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / early childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 51 – 63.

women having essentially different qualities from men.¹⁵⁴ In particular, it is assumed that, because women are biologically capable of bearing children, they have certain innate characteristics which make them especially suited to caring.¹⁵⁵

Upholding essentialist discourses are other discourses such as those associated with psychology and child development knowledge. For instance, both Freudian psychoanalysis and Bowlby's attachment theory place supreme importance on the mother-child dyad.¹⁵⁶ Both assert that a strong mother-child relationship is necessary for healthy development, and that pathology can result if this bond is weakened.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, the role of mother is discursively produced, and reproduced, within, for example, 'mothering' books, baby health clinic advice and media reports. These texts reinforce the construct of child nurturing as the role of women.

A number of writers, particularly post-structural feminists, challenge the essentialised constructs of women and claim that the relationship between women and care is not 'natural' but instead socially constructed.¹⁵⁸ They show that the view of women as carers is not universally accepted, but rather is socially and historically contingent.¹⁵⁹ As Weedon points out, if there were an essence of femaleness, then females would be

¹⁵⁴ M. Bloch, 'Cross-cultural contexts of mothering and childcare: Linking the personal with the professional', in M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / Early Childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 323 - 363.

¹⁵⁵ Anijar, 'Childhood and caring'; Goldstein, 'The distance between feminism and early childhood education'; S. Rocco, 'Construction of gender in 'early childhood': An introduction to feminist poststructuralism', in E. J. Mellor, & K. M. Coombe (eds.), *Issues in Early Childhood Services: Australian Perspectives* (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, 1994), 103 - 116; C. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructural Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

¹⁵⁶ T. J. Berndt, *Child Development* (2nd ed.) (Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark, 1997).

¹⁵⁷ Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*; Polakow, 'Deconstructing the discourse of care'.

¹⁵⁸ B. Pamphilon, 'Discourses of mothering: What can we learn from the past?', *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*, 6 (2) (1999), 240 - 248; Polakow, 'Deconstructing the discourse of care'.

¹⁵⁹ Cannella, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*; Pamphilon, 'Discourses of mothering'; Polakow, 'Deconstructing the discourse of care'; Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructural Theory*.

homogenous.¹⁶⁰ Instead there are multiple expressions of 'womanhood' across time and place. Nevertheless, regardless of whether the essentialised construct of caring is socially constructed, it has real consequences for women and ECEC.

Problematising the Construction of ECEC as Women's Work

Below, I problematise the construction of caring as women's work. I then go on to look at the consequences of the essentialisation of women for ECEC.

Problematising the Construction of ECEC as Women's Work: Care as Women's Work

Essentialist views of care as women's work may subjugate women. The idea of women as carers is a powerful construct and resistant to change. Weedon, for example, says that, despite having the technology to control fertility, it is still assumed that a primary role for women is child production.¹⁶¹ Further, those who do not fulfill this role are constructed as somehow less womanly. Essentialist ideas, therefore, attempt to determine gendered roles: This discriminates, not only against women, but also against men. For instance, divorced fathers rarely get custody of their children and social structures and expectations continue to discourage men from entering 'caring' professions, such as ECEC.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructural Theory*.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶² In 2003, of lone parents with children under 15 years, 11% were lone fathers. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Father's Day 2003: ABS Facts for Features' (Australian Bureau of Statistics: Canberra, 2003). Accessed on 14 June, 2004, from: <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/976dd6d565b6655dca256d970026c6a2?OpenDocument>; P. Sargent, 'The gendering of men in early childhood education', *Sex Roles*. 52 (3/4) (2005), 251 – 259; J. Sumsion, 'Negotiating *otherness*: A male early childhood educator's gender positioning', *International Journal of Early Years*. 8 (2) (2000), 129 – 140. The shortage in male teachers is so acute that Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education, proposed (unsuccessfully) scholarships for male student teachers (L. Doherty, Men-only teaching grants face Senate fight, *The Sydney Morning Herald* 4 May, 2004, p.5).

Furthermore, despite an increase in women's labour participation, childcare remains predominantly the domain of women.¹⁶³ Mothers are supposed to be always available for their children, "omni-present and omni-responsible".¹⁶⁴ As such, women are doubly burdened with the responsibility of balancing work and childcare.¹⁶⁵

Problematizing the Construction of ECEC as Women's Work: The Consequences of Essentialist Views for ECEC

Because 'caring' is a fundamental aspect of ECEC, essentialist ideas have profound effects on its construction. Hauser and Jipson say, for instance, that ECEC is constructed on a "maternalistic ethic of care".¹⁶⁶ That is, the role of the teacher is constructed in the image of the 'good mother'. Noddings exemplified the essentialist view when she maintained that males and females have essential qualities, that caring is essentially a female quality and that teaching is a "prototypical caring relation".¹⁶⁷ The construct of ECEC, therefore, is enmeshed with the ideology of motherhood.

The essentialisation of the care and education of young children has at least two paradoxical consequences for ECEC. On the one hand, as long as mothers are seen as the natural and rightful nurturers of children, then non-maternal childcare, especially formal care, is likely to be considered unnatural and invoke cultural anxiety.¹⁶⁸ This association has potentially devastating consequences for ECEC. In particular, the

¹⁶³ 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.

¹⁶⁴ Pamphilon, 'Discourses of mothering', p.246.

¹⁶⁵ W. A. Goldberg, E. Greenberger, S. Hamill, & R. O'Neil, 'Role demand in the lives of employed single mothers with preschoolers', *Journal of Family Issues*. 13 (3) (1992), 312-333; W. Hall, & P. Callery, 'Balancing personal and family trajectories: An international study of dual-earner couples with pre-school children', *International Journal of Nursing Studies*. 40 (2003), 401-412.

¹⁶⁶ Hauser & Jipson, *Intersections*, p.248.

¹⁶⁷ N. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

¹⁶⁸ Scarr, 'American child care today'.

supposed superiority of maternal care, which seems to underpin a great deal of the research examining the 'effects' of ECEC on children, tends to construct ECEC as somehow deficient. Moreover, non-maternal childcare can be viewed as a threat to the ideology of motherhood.¹⁶⁹ If care can be provided by those other than mothers, then the 'special' place that mothers have in society becomes threatened.

On the other hand, because the essentialist view assumes that the care and education of young children is a naturalistic tendency within women, ECEC is often viewed as natural and unlearned, rather than skilled work that requires knowledgeable and educated teachers.¹⁷⁰ This essentialist view may, in part, account for why those who work in prior-to-school settings have such poor wages and conditions, compared to their counterparts in school settings.¹⁷¹

The essentialisation of ECEC may also contribute to the care / education dichotomy which plagues ECEC. Despite the inseparable nature of care and education within ECEC, because education is generally valued more highly than care, ECEC professionals may privilege the educational aspect of their work and marginalise the caring aspect. Macfarlene and Lewis argue that such privileging occurs within faculties of education that teach undergraduate courses in ECEC.¹⁷² They problematise this focus and say it fails to recognise the multiplicity of ECEC, as well as limits the ways care

¹⁶⁹ Hayden, 'Half full or half empty?'.
¹⁷⁰ D. Phillips, & M. Whitebook, 'The child care provider: Pivotal player in the child's world,' in L. Weiss, P.G. Altbach, G.P. Kelly, & H. G. Petrie (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Early Childhood Education* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 25 – 43.

¹⁷¹ For the award wage of early childhood teachers and childcare workers see: NSW Department of Commerce: <http://www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au>.
¹⁷² K. Macfarlene, & T. Lewis, 'Childcare – human services or education: A genealogical approach', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. 5 (1) (2004), 51 – 67.

can be construed.¹⁷³ Given the relative status of care and education in our society, it is understandable that ECEC professionals construct their work as education. But we must also value the care aspect.¹⁷⁴

Lastly, the essentialist view of care tends to construct early childhood educators as engaging in ECEC because of a naturalistic love of children. An example of this construct can be seen in a piece in *The Sydney Morning Herald* where Stevenson painted a picture of the childcare workers that had cared for his children as angelic:

In seven years I have never seen a single carer loose their temper. In the face of provocation that would reduce most parents to foaming imbeciles, tempestuous two-year-olds are wrapped in a cosy blanket of tranquility. And love. ... That blanket of tranquility seems to extend over the whole centre. Good humour and good guidance prevail. ... these child carers work — like dripping water on stone — to guide the children, and their behaviour, into smoother shapes: not remaking them in someone else's image, but helping them to make themselves.¹⁷⁵

As will be seen, such writing bares remarkable similarities to that of Kindergarten advocates of the late nineteenth century.

This construct suggests carers receive intrinsic rewards when engaging in the care and education of young children, and may be another reason why ECEC workers receive poor pay and conditions. Indeed, such sentiments were voiced in *The Sydney Morning Herald* by a Sydney day care worker who stated:

Most child-care workers who stay in the sector do it for love, not money.¹⁷⁶

The view that teachers engage in ECEC because of their love for children, has been challenged, however. Munro, for instance, claims that many early childhood educators

¹⁷³ Macfarlane & Lewis, 'Childcare – human services or education'.

¹⁷⁴ Moss, 'Getting beyond childcare', p.114.

¹⁷⁵ Stevenson, A few lessons for mum and dad, too at child care.

¹⁷⁶ C. Long, For love, not money, *The Sydney Morning Herald Weekend Edition – My Career*, 11 – 12 September, 2004, p.1.

enter ECEC not because they love children, but because of a desire to bring about a social change.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, Hauser and Jipson say there has been a “shift from historic identifications with a nurturant, maternal role to the avowed identification of the teaching self as agent of social change”.¹⁷⁸ Hauser and Jipson’s statement seems to suggest that the identity of teachers is changing over time along a continuum from essentialist to more socially active roles. But, as has been discussed previously, ECEC has always had a strong social reform agenda, so it is incorrect to suggest that the social change construct has recently emerged as part of an evolutionary process. It is not the case that either one or the other construct exists, but rather that both constructs exist concurrently.

Historical analysis is essential, not only to understand how ECEC came to be constructed as women’s work, but also to ensure that the social and politically active role of earlier ECEC advocates is not overlooked or dismissed. In Chapter Ten, I show how the construct of ECEC as ‘women’s work’ emerged within ‘essentialist’ and ‘new women’ gender discourses dominant in the late nineteenth century. In many ways, these discourses continue to shape ECEC today.

Conclusion to Chapter Four

Chapter Four is the second of two chapters exploring and critiquing several constructs of ECEC identified in the contemporary texts. In Chapter Four, I have examined the constructs of ECEC as socially just education, national work and women’s work. I problematised these constructs, by drawing on deconstructionist literature. I then

¹⁷⁷ P. Munro, ‘Turning facts into puzzles: Feminist and poststructuralist perspectives on life history research’, in M. E. Hauser, & J. J. Jipson (eds.), *Intersections: Feminisms / Early Childhoods* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 111 - 133.

¹⁷⁸ Hauser & Jipson, *Intersections*, p.244.

critiqued these problematisations, and raised questions about how these constructs emerged.

I do not suggest that the constructs of ECEC raised in Chapters Three and Four are the only ones possible; instead I recognise the “possibility of alternative positions, understandings and approaches”.¹⁷⁹ But I believe that my analysis of the contemporary texts provides a valuable insight into the diverse ways ECEC is constructed in NSW today.

My concern in this thesis, however, is to historicise these contemporary constructs of ECEC. As such, I have travelled back in time to examine the ‘moment’ when ECEC first emerged in NSW, the period 1893 – 1915. Chapters Five to Ten present the findings of my analysis of the historical texts examined for this study (first introduced in Chapter Two). This analysis revealed historical constructs that are remarkably similar to the contemporary constructs, identified in Chapters Three and Four. Chapters Five to Ten each deal with one construct, namely 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. I argue that these various constructs were constituted within *Economic, Scientific, Liberal / Progressive, Nationalist, and Gender* discourses.

¹⁷⁹ Dahlberg *et al.*, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*, p.2.