

CHAPTER NINE

ECEC CONSTRUCTED AS NATIONAL WORK

In Chapter Four, I argued that a dominant contemporary construct of ECEC is that of 'national work', that is, a commercial venture that benefits the nation; an investment in the future potential of children; and as a means of facilitating workforce participation. Although there were privately operated Kindergartens at the turn of the nineteenth century, the commercial construct was not a dominant theme in the sources examined. The constructs of ECEC as an investment in the future potential of children; and as a means of facilitating workforce participation were however prevalent. In this chapter, I argue that these constructs emerged out of nationalist discourses, as illustrated in Figure 14.

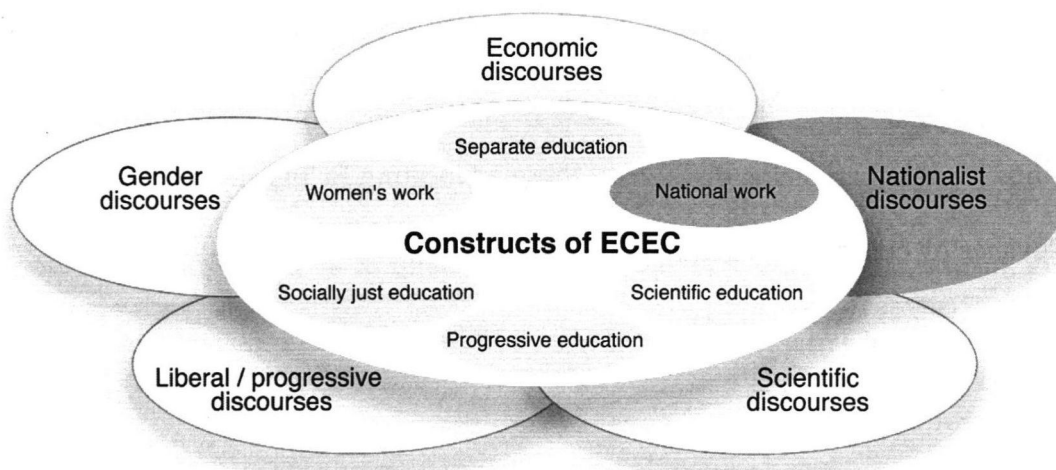


Figure 14: The construction of ECEC as national work within nationalist discourses.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the nationalist debates about nation building and national identity evident in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia. I then go on to show how, within nationalist discourses, children came to be constructed as both valuable assets and, paradoxically, as dangerous. These constructs led to calls for intervention into children's lives, both to 'save' children and control them.

The idea of saving children that emerged within nationalistic discourses, is subtly different from the idea of rescuing children that emerged within liberal / progressive discourses, discussed in the previous chapter. Whereas, the idea of rescuing children was based on moral and social justice concerns, and focused on assisting children to grow into morally upright and self-supporting individuals, the idea of saving children was entrenched within nationalistic concerns and focused on saving them from physical harm and shaping them into productive citizens, for the benefit of the nation.

I argue that within nationalist discourses ECEC, and particularly Sydney Day Nursery, emerged as institutions for saving children. I problematise this construct, drawing attention to how it led to the creation of two distinct ECEC services, and resulted in the care / education dichotomy, which, as I discussed in Chapter Four, is still evident today. I also show how within nationalist discourses, ECEC was constructed as a means of producing future productive citizens and preventing crime. These constructs are similarly problematised. I contend that the construction of ECEC as national work was a strategy used by those involved in the establishment of Free Kindergartens and Sydney Day Nurseries to uphold the relevance of ECEC at a time when Australian national prosperity and identity was of concern.

Nationalist Discourses

Nationalist discourses became increasingly dominant in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia, and were inextricably linked to Australian Federation. Nineteenth century 'Australia' consisted of a number of British colonies, namely, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania

(formerly Van Dieman's Land).¹ By the 1890s, each of these colonies had achieved self-government but was subject to British rule.² Although the colonies were more alike than different, they were primarily self-interested. They were concerned with their own growth and development and, as such, were in competition with one another, resulting in inter-colonial mistrust and parochialism. Nevertheless, Federation, the joining of the colonies into a nation, was a logical next step in the development of White (British) Australia.

Public discussion about unifying the colonies and the development of an Australian nation had arisen as early as the 1850s.³ It was in the 1880s, however, following the centenary of colonisation, that these debates grew in intensity and led to several Federation conventions being held in the 1890s.⁴ Australian Federation was proclaimed, amongst much pomp and ceremony, on the first day of the new century, 1 January, 1901.⁵ While this is not the place to go into an in-depth discussion, the discourses associated with Federation are central to my discussion of the construction of ECEC as national work. For this reason, I briefly outline below the dominant nationalist discourses evident in the debates surrounding Federation. These debates reveal a complex mix of pragmatic economic concerns, fear of invasion, and a desire for a unique Australian identity. Each of these debates contributed to a growing impulse for the development of an 'Australian nation', albeit firmly tied to the British Empire.

¹ The name 'Australia' had been used by Flinders and later Governor Macquarie; by the 1870s it had come into "common parlance". B. Matthews, *Federation* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999, p.34.

² J. Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History* (London: Longman, 1988).

³ Matthews, *Federation*.

⁴ It took ten years, from the first convention, held in Melbourne February 1890 (with Henry Parkes presiding), until 1 January 1901 for Federation to become a reality (Matthews, *Federation*).

⁵ Interestingly, there appears to have been no involvement of Indigenous Australians in the ceremonies. National Film and Sound Archive, *Federation films* [videorecording] (Canberra, ACT, 1992).

Federation served a pragmatic purpose. The late nineteenth century in Australia was a turbulent time of rapid economic growth, gold rushes, investment, speculation, economic recession, agricultural failure, and labour strikes.⁶ In this boom and bust economy, a realisation dawned on many that federation of the colonies was necessary for economic growth.⁷ Federation would provide a central government, remove the crippling tariffs between the colonies and lead to more efficient postal and transportation systems. Simply put, the colonies would be stronger united than as independent colonies.

Although some, such as Lawson, campaigned for the development of an independent Australia, overwhelmingly, the argument was for strengthening the ties between Australia and Britain by uniting the Australian colonies in a Federation under British rule.⁸ Parkes was particularly strident on the matter of Australia's 'place' in the development of the 'Great British Empire', as shown in the following excerpt of a report on one of his many orations about Federation:

Loyalty and attachment to the Empire in seeking to build up, under the silken threads of connection with the Empire, a commonwealth here, which would be as free for all the purposes of human life and progress and liberty and law and order as any government formed by man could be. (Cheers.) Beyond that he still cherished the dream that these Australian colonies and all other parts of their wide extending Empire might unite in compact groups, each group forming a perfectly self-governing fabric, and yet united in one great constellation of glories, the mother with her daughters spreading light, civilisation, and liberty all over the world.⁹

⁶ M. Cannon, *The Land Boomers: The Complete History* (2nd ed.) (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1995).

⁷ *ibid.* See Cannon for a comprehensive discussion of the financial situation in late nineteenth century Victoria and New South Wales.

⁸ Address by Sir Henry Parkes, Federation of the Colonies, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 July, 1893, p.5.

⁹ *ibid.*

So it can be seen that Australia's national spirit was mixed with loyalty to Britain and Empire building.¹⁰ As will be shown further on, these ties to Britain were celebrated and thus reinforced within Free Kindergartens.

Arguments for federation were also fuelled by paranoia about invasion, which fed on insularity and racial intolerance. In particular, there was a concern that Australia's geographical isolation made its sovereignty vulnerable to threats from the north.¹¹ Media reports of the day reveal strong racial prejudices and intolerance. 'Foreigners' were portrayed as taking employment from British settlers, changing Australian society, and even bringing infections. Syrian hawkers were described as — "cunning ... insolent ... inconceivably disgusting"¹² — while the Chinese were reported as mercenaries, 'plundering' the wealth of the land.¹³ *The Bulletin* newspaper published many sardonic political cartoons such as the one over the page (Figure 15) depicting Australia being 'overrun' by 'foreigners'.¹⁴

¹⁰ Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in Australia's involvement in the Boer war (1899 – 1902). Australia, loyal to its British 'motherland', held patriotic rallies in the street and troops were sent to put down the uprising in South Africa, despite concerns that the war was unjust (Matthews, *Federation*).

¹¹ Especially active in these debates was *The Australian Natives Association*, which saw Federation as a means of advancing Australian born people. Their cry was *Australia for the Australians!* They sought to advance Australian art, politics and Australian made goods. Their aim was to be patriotic to Australia whilst at the same time being loyal to Britain. They believed in meritocracy and an egalitarian society. But they were racist. They feared the invasion of Australia, opposed immigration, and sought the expulsion of coloured people. Australia for the Australians, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 January, 1893, p.6.

¹² The Syrian invasion: An outcry against coloured hawkers, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 January, 1893, p.6. See also The Syrian invasion: The hawkers rendezvous, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 January, 1893, p.9; Syrian hawkers, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 January, 1893, p.5; Some suburban experiences of Asiatic pedlars, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 January, 1893, p.7.

¹³ Such sentiments are ironic given British colonisation of Australia and the way the Indigenous population were mistreated.

¹⁴ *The Bulletin*, 22 August, 1896, p.16. Reproduced by courtesy of *The Bulletin*. See also: The Chinese in Australia, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 January, 1893, p.7, for details of a book published by the Victorian Agent-General, Dr. Pearson, which justified the exclusion of Chinese from Australia on racial grounds.



AUSTRALIA FOR THE AUSTRALIANS.
*Sunday scene in "Lilly Bluke"-street, Melb.—
 showing how the Chinese invasion is progressing.*

Figure 15: Australia for the Australians, 1896. Reproduced by courtesy of *The Bulletin*.

Moreover, according to Clarke, the Indigenous population was thought of as no more than a dying race, doomed to disappear, and of little more than scientific interest as 'specimens' of a 'primitive' expression of humanity.¹⁵ In direct response to the fear of invasion, a number of racist policies were adopted, especially in regards to immigration.¹⁶

Debates about Federation also reveal a growing sense of Australian national identity. The non-Indigenous population of the colonies was overwhelmingly British, as were their laws, cultural heritage and power brokers. But by the 1890s, two thirds of the population were Australian born.¹⁷ The increasing number of 'native born' Australians no doubt contributed to the awakening of a sense of Australian identity, distinct from that of their British counterparts.¹⁸

These national feelings can be observed in many ways. There was, for example, an increased interest in the Australian 'bush'. Romanticised myths about bushrangers and earlier pioneers became the focus of a distinctly Australian literature, as in the poetry of Henry Lawson and A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson, and the shearer became a national icon.¹⁹

There was also a shift by artists such as Tom Roberts and Frederick Mc Cubbin to more

¹⁵ C. M. H. Clarke, *A History of Australia, Volumes V & VI: From 1888 to 1935* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1981), p.160. See also Rickard, *Australia*; Matthews, *Federation*.

¹⁶ One of the first Acts passed by the new Commonwealth Government was the *Immigration Restriction Act*, 1901, which enabled the prohibition of any person on the basis of illiteracy in a European language. This act remained in force until 1958. *Immigration Restriction Act*, 1901. Accessed on 14 June, 2004, from: <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au>.

¹⁷ Clarke, *A History of Australia, Volumes V & VI*; Rickard, *Australia*.

¹⁸ Address by Sir Henry Parkes, Federation of the Colonies, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 July, 1893, p.5.

¹⁹ A. B. Paterson, *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1896).

accurately reflect the colours and textures of the Australian landscape.²⁰ In music, Nellie Melba was feted in Australia and internationally. In the sporting arena, Australia developed its own code of football in the 1880s, and interestingly an 'Australian' cricket team toured England in the 1890s, well before an 'Australian' nation existed.²¹ Moreover, a number of exhibitions were held in the various colonies, including 'The Great Exhibition' hosted in Melbourne in 1888, which proclaimed the accomplishments of Australia and its part in the progress of the great British Empire.²² Much of this literature, artwork and sport continues to contribute to what some argue is a quintessentially Australian identity.

Federation was a critical time in Australia's history, for it was the birth of a nation full of potential. As such, the dawn of the new century bought an opportunity to develop and build this 'young' country into a strong and prosperous nation. Such sentiments are expressed by Annie Besant, the Theosophist Campaigner, who was quoted as having said in a speech in Sydney:

There are opportunities for improving social conditions in this new and underdeveloped country which are not to be found in the old world. We are building to-day the nation of the future.²³

As will be seen later in the chapter, similar phrases about nation building appear frequently within Kindergarten Union documents.

²⁰ To see examples of this work go to
http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/collection/australian_painting.html &
<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/collection/australian/painting/m/mccubbin.html>.

²¹ E. W., O'Sullivan, *Under the Southern Cross* (Sydney: William Brooks, 1906).

²² *ibid.*

²³ A woman of today: Mrs. Besant at the opera-house, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 September, 1894, p.6.

Within these discourses of nation building and national identity, two dominant, yet somewhat oppositional, constructs of the child can be identified in the historical sources examined: the child as 'asset' and the child as 'dangerous'. I explore these constructs below.

Nationalist Discourses and the Construction of the Child as Valuable Asset

As highlighted in the previous chapter, in media reports of the 1890s, there was very little evidence of a concern with children's health and welfare. It was not until nationalist debates became dominant, tying children's health to nationalist concerns, that systemic attempts were made to intervene in children's lives and improve their well being.

Despite almost daily reports of children's ill health, injury, murder or abandonment, little attention seems to have been paid to these issues in the early 1890s.²⁴ Often reports of a child's death or abandonment would be no more than a line or two, as in this typical report in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

DISCOVERY OF THE DEAD BODY OF AN INFANT — Last evening Mr. Patrick Muldeeny found the dead body of a newly-born infant in a biscuit box, hidden amongst some bushes near the fence of Roslyn Gardens, Darlinghurst.²⁵

²⁴ Between 1893 and 1895 *The Sydney Morning Herald* was replete with reports of children's injuries. Most common among the reported injuries were burns and scalds. There were seventy-five reports of children under eight years being burned or scalded. Fifty-two of these children subsequently died from their injuries. The most common cause of burns was children playing unsupervised with matches, candles or fire, and their clothes igniting. Deaths of children from burning were so common at one stage that an editorial questioned whether or not there was an "epidemic of carelessness" (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October, 1894, p.5). The second most commonly reported injuries were vehicular. Between 1893 and 1895 there were fifty-six reports of children being injured by carts, trams, omnibuses and trains, or being kicked by horses. Twenty-six of these children died from their injuries. Drowning was another frequent cause of death with thirty-six children's deaths being reported. Many of these children had fallen into the Sydney harbour or a river whilst playing unsupervised. Others fell into water holes, uncovered wells or containers.

²⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 December, 1895, p.4 [capitals in the original]. Interestingly Roslyn Gardens was later to be the site of the Sydney Kindergarten Training College.

Only sensational events, such as a child's murder at the hands of its mother, would attract a more thorough examination, and there was very little, if any, editorial comment on the number of child deaths and injuries in the 1890s.

The illustration on page 319 (Figure 16) from *The Bulletin* serves to powerfully reflect a general lack concern for young children.²⁶ Although this cartoon was possibly an attempt at irony, its purpose seems not to raise awareness of the abject and dangerous living conditions experienced by many poor children, for the children's well nourished, smiling faces seem to mitigate against this reading. Instead, it appears to be an attempt to humorously depict children's precociousness. That such an attempt at humour be made at the expense of a child's possible death seems callous to contemporary eyes.

This is not to say there were no expressions of concern with children's health in the early 1890s. In 1894, Dr Richard Arthur, for instance, attempted to raise awareness of the large numbers of children's deaths, which he referred to as:

... the massacre of the innocents.²⁷

He argued that the death of children was:

A great national question. ... Something must be done to prevent this sacrifice of hundreds and thousands of our babes at the shrine of ignorance. No state is justified in allowing such a slaughter to go on, and I believe our rulers will only have to realise this to at once take steps to come to the rescue of the little ones.²⁸

There was also concern expressed about the financial cost of childhood death:

The loss ... of children under five years old represents a serious item ... these deaths involve a large unproductive expenditure.²⁹

²⁶ *The Bulletin*, 8 February, 1896, p. 10. Reproduced by courtesy of *The Bulletin*.

²⁷ R. Arthur, The massacre of the innocents, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 December, 5.

²⁸ *ibid*, p.5.

²⁹ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 February, 1894, p.8.

But, by and large, it was not until the dawn of the new century, when nationalist discourses became dominant, and the declining fertility was recognised as a threat to national prosperity, that infant and child mortality became more widely considered as problematic and needing remedy.

Nationalist debates centred on the development of an Australia that was strong and prosperous. Such concerns heightened awareness of the need to build Australia's population, preferably by increasing the number of British citizens. Recognising the difficulty in attracting migrants from Britain — “being so far removed from those large and overcrowded centres of other parts of the globe from which we would naturally desire to receive immigrants” — attention turned to propagating the British population already here.³⁰

Population issues came under increasing scrutiny, and the decreasing birthrate, high infant mortality and morbidity rates, which had for so long been ignored, came to be widely considered as a threat to the development of national prosperity.³¹ Indeed, the Government became so concerned with the declining fertility that it called for a Royal Commission into the issue, headed by Mackellor and entitled — *Decline of the*

³⁰ S. O. Benjamin, 'Infantile mortality in New South Wales', *The Actural Society of NSW Ninth Session*, 1905, 81 – 85, p.82.

³¹ The birthrate declined by 20.8% in the ten years from 1891 – 1900. But the infant mortality had, in fact, also declined considerably in the last twenty years of the century, from a high point in 1884 at 89.03 per 1000 births to 40.73 per 1000 in 1904, and death rates in NSW were considerably lower than those in Britain (Benjamin, 'Infantile mortality in New South Wales', p.81; W. F. Litchfield, 'Charts on infantile mortality', *Australian Medical Congress*, 1911; C. K. Mackellor, (President) & Royal Commission, *Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birthrate and on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales: Volume 1. Report, together with copies of Commissions, Diagrams, Statistical Evidence, and Statistical Exhibits, &c.* (Sydney: William Applegate Gullick Government Printer, 1904). Armstrong, Sydney and Cambridge attributed the decline to the better standard of living of the 'poorer classes' in Australia than overseas (W. G. Armstrong, C. M. Sydney, & D. P. H. Cambridge, 'Some lessons from the statistics of infantile mortality in Sydney', *Transactions of the Seventh Session of the Australian Medical Congress, Adelaide, September, 1905*, 385 – 394.



BREAKING THE NEWS.

JANE (*running up hurriedly*): "I LOVE you, mother!"

MOTHER: "I'm glad to hear it, my dear."

J.: "Mother, I love father, too."

M.: "I hope you will always do so, dear."

J.: "Mother, Jimmy's fell down the well, and I never pushed him."

Figure 16: Breaking the news, 1896. Reproduced by courtesy of *The Bulletin*.

Birthrate and on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales.³² Mackellor proclaimed

that the decline in the birthrate was:

... a grave disorder sapping the vitals of a new people, dispelling its hopes, blighting its prospects, and threatening its continuance.³³

He argued that people had become selfish and negligent in their 'patriotic duty' to produce children for the good of the nation:

The people — led astray by false and pernicious doctrine in the belief that personal interests and ambitions, a high standard of ease, and comfort, and luxury, are the essential aims of life, and that these aims are best attained by refusing to accept the consequences which nature has ordained shall follow marriage — have neglected, and are neglecting, their true duty to themselves, to their fellow countrymen, and to posterity.³⁴

In ways that are similar to the contemporary context discussed in Chapter Four, the declining fertility meant that children were in short supply and, as with any scarce 'commodity', they became more 'valuable'. It therefore became important to ensure that children survived. Benjamin, for instance, in an address to the Actuarial Society of New South Wales in 1905 argued:

The care and nurture of infants from birth, in a young country with such a sparse population as ours, is of the greatest vital importance ... we are practically dependent on our births for our increase in population. Having those births, it is then our pressing duty to see to it that everything possible is done to preserve, as much as we can, our infant life from undue waste through negligence, neglect and ignorance on the part of those who are responsible for them.³⁵

³² Mackellor, *Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birthrate and on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales*. This informative document clearly reveals the highly patriarchal times. There is a recognition that the decline in fertility was attributable, to a large extent, on the Depression. But it is also argued that the decline was due to women's disinclination to have children and their "deliberate interference with the function of procreation" (p.14). The cost and responsibility of childrearing to 'produce' the next generation for the nation's prosperity, is squarely placed on the shoulders of women. There is no recognition of the 'cost' to women either in monetary or health terms. Women are merely constructed as baby producers. Furthermore, there is little mention of the poor medical standards of 'laying-in' hospitals, children's homes and general hospitals and the contribution they made to infant and maternal deaths. H. B. Mulholland, *Coffins or Cradles?: Or the Doctor, Drink, and "Devil," Decimating our Democracy* (Sydney: Mortons, 1914).

³³ Mackellor, *Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birthrate and on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales*, p.53.

³⁴ *ibid*, p.52.

³⁵ Benjamin, 'Infantile mortality in New South Wales', p.81.

Some used socially just or progressive rhetoric to criticise the high child mortality:

The awful slaughter of babes throughout the world to-day is the surest evidence of lack of civilisation. It is more than culpable negligence; it is murder chargeable to us in our collective capacity.³⁶

But principally, within dominant nationalist discourses, children's health and well-being was constructed as a matter of national concern:

As a matter of what may be termed "national necessity", we must to the utmost preserve our infant life from undue waste, so that they may grow up and become a portion of that young and vigorous manhood which is absolutely needed, not only for the development of this country, but for the actual future existence of the nation in these "sunny climes".³⁷

In much the same way as they are today, children were constructed as valuable assets, 'social capital', and 'investments' in the future of Australia. Indeed, Benjamin argued infant welfare should be of concern to:

... the economist, the social or municipal reformer, and all those who have at heart the present and future welfare and well-being of society at large.³⁸

The construction of children as valuable assets and the subsequent increase in concern for children's health, lead to systematic attempts to reduce the death rate. For instance, investigations were made into the causes of diarrhoea, the most common cause of infant mortality.³⁹ These investigations resulted in legislative changes in the composition and preparation of milk substitutes for infants, as well as improvements in the delivery, care, and storage of milk and the establishment of 'milk-depots' for the distribution of milk

³⁶ W. G. Spence, *The Child, the Home, and the State* (Sydney: The Worker Print, 1908).

³⁷ Benjamin, 'Infantile mortality in New South Wales', p.85 [speech marks in the original].

³⁸ *ibid*, p.81

³⁹ Diarrhoea was the most common cause of death of children under 1 year at 40.9 per 1,000 births in Sydney. The actual death rate from diarrhoea was, however, probably higher than this, as some deaths recorded as 'debility' or 'inanition' were also likely to have been the result of gastro-enteritis. The high numbers of deaths due to diarrhoea is not surprising given that it was not until 1888 that the water supply for Sydney changed from Botany swamp to catchment areas south west of Sydney. The 1890s saw an improvement in sanitation and the laying of sewers to replace open cesspits, but this was not completed until 1897 (Armstrong et al, 'Some lessons from the statistics of infantile mortality in Sydney'). Fortunately, it was recognised in the early twentieth century that whilst death caused by diarrhoea was extremely high amongst those not breast-fed, breast fed babies were relatively immune from death from

for infants.⁴⁰ Moreover, there was a burgeoning literature about children's health and care.⁴¹ Information on feeding, dressing and 'managing' children appeared in several editions of *The Dawn* and *Women's Budget*.⁴² Several Australian books were also published concerned with children's health. Aitken's text, which was described as a — "handy book for mothers to aid them in the care and management of Australian children" — gave general advice on such diverse topics as preparing for a baby, diet, clothing and cleansing, as well as how to care for minor ailments such as earache, constipation and infectious diseases.⁴³ It even included recipes, medicines and home remedies. Interestingly, another childcare text by Ellis, which covered similar topics to Aitken, also included a description of children's developmental milestones as they were understood at the time.⁴⁴

diarrhoea (Armstrong et al, 'Some lessons from the statistics of infantile mortality in Sydney'). Inevitably, it was 'ignorant' mothers who were blamed for the deaths of their infants.

⁴⁰ H. G. Chapman, 'Legal standards for infants food', *The Medical Journal of Australia*. 11 (15) (1915), 342 – 343.

⁴¹ For a detailed examination of literature on children's health and care in the United States see J. Wrigley, 'Do young children need intellectual stimulation? Experts' advice to parents, 1900 – 1985', *History of Education Quarterly*, 29 (10) (1989), 41 – 75.

⁴² See for instance: Children and their management: Bathing, *The Dawn*, 1 December, 1900, p.17; A. Hanson, Children and their management [part 3], *The Dawn*, 1 February, 1901, p.17; Infant feeding, *Woman's Budget*, 22 May, 1906, p.15; Infant feeding, *Woman's Budget*, 29 May, 1906, p.19; Infant feeding, *Woman's Budget*, 5 June, 1906, p.19; The care of children, *Woman's Budget*, January, 10, 1908, p.16.

⁴³ E. Aitken, *The Australian Mothers' Own Book: A Complete Treatise on the Rearing and Management of Australian Children* (Sydney: George B. Philip and Son., 1912), p.5.

⁴⁴ E. Ellis, *Advice to Australian Mothers: A Guide to the Care and Management of Children* (London: Ward, Lock and Co, 1902). Both Aitken's and Ellis' books were specifically written for the Australian context. They recognised that in Australia many women, particularly those who lived in the country, would not have access to medical assistance. They may not even have had access to another woman to assist them. These books gave detailed advice on how to prepare for confinement. They explained how mothers should prepare their birthing bed and what to do in the absence of medical care, for example, how to tie the umbilical cord; and care for the mother during the expulsion of the placenta. The advice was, however, prescriptive. For example, in relation to feeding, mothers were advised to feed every 2 hours. "From the beginning, regularity in feeding must be observed" (Ellis, p.47). And 'rocking' was not to be condoned: "No rocking. Let her beware, as she values her future peace, not to trip, trip him to sleep in her rocking chair, not to put her foot on his cradle-rocker (which by the way, should not exist), and lullaby him to dreamland" (Ellis, p.87). Interestingly, Maybanke Anderson wrote a childcare book, published in 1919, *Mother Lore*. In the preface she declares "This little book is not written for teachers, nor for learned women only. It is rather meant for all — fathers, mothers, or teachers, who, recognising their responsibility, seek to do their duty to their children and to the nation" (M. Anderson, *Mother Lore* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1919).

To summarise, within nationalist discourses, children came to be constructed as valuable ‘assets’ that needed to be protected and nurtured in order to reach their potential: not just because to do so was fair and just, as was the case within liberal / progressive discourses, but rather because it was for the good of the nation. Both Sydney Day Nursery and Free Kindergartens were constructed within these nationalist discourses as institutions that could not only save children’s lives but also produce future productive citizens. As well as being constructed as assets, however, another perhaps less positive construct of the child emerged within nationalist discourses — the child as dangerous.

Nationalist Discourses and the Construction of the Child as Dangerous

Within nationalist discourses there arose the notion of a peculiarly ‘Australian child’. In particular, the ‘Australian bush child’ was celebrated as strong, independent, ingenious and resilient — if a little spoilt and boisterous:⁴⁵

In the boys and girls of Australia there is some of the best material in the world for British citizenship. The hardships of life in the northern bush develop in them self-reliance, fortitude, and adaptability of character. ... They are children still, merry, self-reliant, troublesome, but they will soon be men and women.⁴⁶

The character of the Australian bush child was immortalised in Ethel Turner’s *Seven Little Australians*, referred to in Chapter Eight. Turner wrote of these fictional siblings:

Not one of the seven is really good, for the very excellent reason that Australian children never are. ... There is a lurking sparkle of joyousness and rebellion and mischief in her [Australia], and therefore in children.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ J. Kociumbus, ‘Lost in the bush: Searching for the Australian child’, *History of Education Review*. 30 (2) (2001), 37 – 54; K. Torney, *Babes in the Bush: The Making of an Australian Image* (Freemantle: Curtin University Books, 2005).

⁴⁶ Wake up Australian mothers, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October, 1910, p.5.

⁴⁷ E. Turner, *Seven Little Australians* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1894 / 1988).

A certain anxiety pervades these descriptions, however. Whilst, on the one hand 'bush children' were constructed as 'good and wholesome' and having the potential to contribute to the development of the nation, on the other hand, they were also constructed as 'rebellious', full of 'mischief' and 'troublesome', in short — potentially dangerous.⁴⁸ But it was the children who dwelt in the poor suburbs of the city who were considered to pose the greatest threat to society.

Poor children, it was argued, were exposed to adverse environmental influences that led to them becoming criminals:

It is the surrounding amongst which they have to live from the time they begin to exist to their death ... [that] make these horrible specimens of humanity.⁴⁹

Indeed, Carruthers (MP) cautioned:

If you let the little ones pick up their early notions, unkempt and untended, in the streets and gutters of our towns and cities – if you leave them exposed to these unfavourable influences in the most impressionable years of their lives, they will run riot, and you will have all the greater difficulty afterwards in educating them to a bright, useful manhood or womanhood.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ These divergent views of the child are perhaps connected to Australia's history as a penal colony. In the early years of white settlement, Australia's role as a penal colony had concerned many. There were fears that children born of convict parents, the so-called 'currency lads and lasses', would inevitably follow the vices of their progenitors and grow into convicts themselves and thereby threaten the development of Australian society (R. Ward, & K. Macnab, 'The nature and nurture of the first generation of native-born Australians', *Historical Studies*. 10 (39), (1962), 289 – 308.) On the whole, this had not happened. Instead, by and large, these children had grown into healthy, law abiding and productive members of society. Rickard has suggested, because these children failed to follow their parents' behaviours, there was a prevailing sense of optimism and hopefulness that children were the 'great hope' for the future.

⁴⁹ S. Dickson, Another View of the Larrikins, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 April, 1893, p.4.

⁵⁰ J. H. M. Carruthers, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6729.

As such, something had to be done to keep these children off the streets and prevent them from:

...growing up to be a pest to society.⁵¹

As will be shown further on, advocates claimed that ECEC was that ‘something’.

Within nationalist discourses children were also considered dangerous if they failed to measure up to acceptable standards. Particularly vocal in this regard, were the proponents of eugenics, mentioned in Chapter Seven. Weiham, for instance, wrote in the *Australian Kindergarten Magazine*:

Under the idea that every child born into this world is sent by special providence, we have allowed the diseased, the feeble-minded and the criminally recklessly to propagate their kind after their own likeness, and as a result we have an ever-increasing rabble of the insane, the degenerate, and the unemployable.⁵²

According to Weiham, the country could ill-afford such children:

In these days of international competition, keen and merciless, the question of mere survival as a nation is more and more definitely resolving itself into one of average fitness – if individual efficiency.⁵³

So, whilst arguments circulated about saving children, according to Weiham’s point of view, it was important that they be the ‘right sort’ of children.

To summarise, the construction of children within nationalist discourses as both valuable assets and at the same time dangerous, raised the profile of children and legitimated intervention into their lives. Within these nationalist discourses, three dominant themes of ECEC as national work emerged from the historical sources, ECEC

⁵¹ An Aged Citizen, The Larrikin Question, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 July, 1893, p.3.

⁵² A. W. Weiham, ‘Eugenics or race culture’, *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 3 (2) (1912), 3 – 4, p.3.

⁵³ *ibid*, p.3.

as: (i) saving children; (ii) producing future productive citizens; and (iii) preventing crime. I explore these three constructs below.

The Construction Of ECEC within Nationalist Discourses:

Saving Children

In the poor suburbs where Free Kindergartens were established, many mothers of young children were compelled to work. Without childcare these women either had to take their children with them or leave them at home, often unattended. It appears that those establishing Free Kindergartens were aware of this situation. Indeed, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, one argument frequently extended for the provision of Free Kindergartens was that children of working mothers were left unattended on the street. An anecdote often retold by Maybanke Anderson when advocating Free Kindergarten, was of her encounter with a mother on the streets of Woolloomooloo. As reported in *The Story of Kindergarten*, when asked by Anderson if she worked, the mother replied:

“Yes’m, mostly every day. Either washin’ or cleanin’. What do I do with the children? Well, yer see it’s like this. The lidies where I go won’t ‘ave no youngters about the place, so I ‘ave to leave ‘em ‘ere.” “Outside?” “Well, you know, I couldn’t leave the door open, so I ‘ave just to lock ‘em out”. And there they were, three grubby mites, sitting on the narrow curb, with their feet in the gutter. They were among our first children.⁵⁴

Ironically, the “lidies” where this mother went to work were probably middle-class women, like Anderson, who were supposed, in popular belief, to be concerned with children’s issues.⁵⁵ But, even though Kindergarteners were aware that children’s mothers worked, they did not alter their practices to offer more effective work-related

⁵⁴ M. Anderson, ‘The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W’, in Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, *The story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, 1911), 18 – 29, p.21 [speech marks in the original].

⁵⁵ According to Roberts, Anderson saw ECEC as a means of fulfilling “the twin social and educational needs for free, safe, childcare and happy learning”. J. Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1993, p.109).

childcare. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Free Kindergartens were only open on a sessional basis, necessitating the dismissal of young children back onto the 'dangerous streets' and into the path of potential harm. Moreover, they catered primarily for children three years of age and older. For mothers of younger children, there were few safe childcare options. It was not until 1905, when nationalist discourses became highly prevalent, that the Sydney Day Nursery Association emerged as an institution that would 'save' very young children 'abandoned' by their working mothers, by offering work-related childcare.

The Sydney Day Nursery Association constitution explicitly stated that one of its objectives was:

... to properly care for the babies of poor working women of Sydney during the hours when mothers are forced to be at work.⁵⁶

Sydney Day Nursery operated from 7am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday and 7am to 2.30pm on Saturdays. Initially catering only for children aged from birth to three years, they later raised the upper age limit to school age.⁵⁷

A major aim of the Sydney Day Nursery Association was to save the child:

The Sydney Day Nursery Association came into existence to look after the poor little unprotected children of the working women who have to go out all day to earn a living, and have nobody to care for their babies in their absence. And many a little child it has saved from running about the streets from morning till night, while the mother — more often than not the breadwinner of the family — is away doing a day's work!⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1905 – 1906*, no page number.

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p.13.

⁵⁸ 'The Sydney Day Nursery Association', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 3 (4) (1911), p.4.

As will be discussed more fully in the following chapter, this childcare was, however, only available for 'needy mothers' who, because of family circumstances, were working to support themselves and their families.

Within Sydney Day Nursery Association documents, the nursery's work of saving children was firmly tied to nationalistic concerns:

The Nursery deserves the public support, because any institution that exists for the care and well-being of the children of the State is doing noble work. These children are the men and women of to-morrow, and during these times of wastage and ravage it is in the coming generation that the hope of the country lies.⁵⁹

The rhetoric here is very similar to that in the *Royal Commission into Births and Deaths*, introduced earlier in the chapter. The "wastage and ravage" referred to is the death and injury toll from World War One, and children are being constructed as the 'hope' for the future. By aligning itself with such discourses, the Sydney Day Nursery Association was perhaps seeking to justify and legitimate its work.

The historical sources suggest that care within Sydney Day Nursery was based on a medical model, and orientated toward providing a safe and healthy environment for children. For instance, Goldschmidt (Honorable Secretary) claimed:

The little daily inmates are indeed fortunate to be able to spend their days in such happy, healthful surroundings ... airy and thoroughly sanitary conditions are the main factors towards good health.⁶⁰

Further, Sydney Day Nursery was staffed by nursing professionals, rather than teachers, as was the case in Free Kindergartens. Sydney Day Nursery was also constructed as

⁵⁹ V. Davenport, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1914 – 1915*, p.5.

⁶⁰ R. Goldschmidt, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1913 – 1914*. p.5.

saving children from ill-informed parenting practices and unsanitary home conditions.⁶¹

For instance, Matron Breden stated:

Many of the little ones who come to us have been the victims of ignorant and improper feeding, and it is encouraging to note the marked improvement which follows their admission to the cleanliness and comfort, and the wholesome living of the Nursery.⁶²

Similarly, Matron O'Keeffe later claimed:

The children respond quickly to the regular feeding, bathing, and fresh air treatment. When we realise that to many families one room is home, the change of surroundings for ten or more hours of the twenty-four must necessarily bring improvement and probably is the turning point in many a child's life, laying the foundation for good health so necessary to those with a life of work awaiting them.⁶³

Here again, Sydney Day Nursery was constructed as saving children's health, assisting them to reach adulthood, and contributing to the workforce, thereby doing a service for the country. This is a slightly different construct from that of rescuing children from moral corruption, identified in the earlier Kindergarten Union documents, which I argued in the previous chapter emerged from liberal / progressive discourses.

Health concerns were also evident, to some degree, within Kindergarten Union literature. For instance, Ethel Davenport (Secretary of the Kindergarten Union) contended:

In that neighbourhood [Surry Hills] perhaps more than any other it is most desirable that the Kindergarten should be in a bright and airy building as the children come from such overcrowded and dreary homes.⁶⁴

Further, the teachers monitored children's health, bathed lice infested children, and dressed children's wounds. But concerns with children's health did not emerge as a

⁶¹ J. Dane, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1905 – 1906*, p.6.

⁶² Breden, Matron's Report, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1905 - 1906*, p.9.

⁶³ O'Keeffe, Matron's Report, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1908 - 1909*, p.29.

⁶⁴ E. Davenport, Kindergarten Union of New South Wales annual report for year ending May 31st, 1906, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, pp.3 – 4, p.3.

dominant theme in Kindergarten Union documents. Moreover, it seems that some Free Kindergartens were far from healthy places. Indeed, Golden Fleece Kindergarten was closed in 1912, due to it being:

... dangerous and unhygienic.⁶⁵

It can be seen then, that Sydney Day Nursery, in particular, was constructed within nationalistic discourses as saving very young children, by providing extended hours work related care, in a safe and healthy environment. Free Kindergartens also provided work related childcare, but in a limited way.

In the early years of their operation, there was a close association between Sydney Day Nursery Association and the Kindergarten Union. Many of those involved in Sydney Day Nursery Association, such as, Jeanie Dane, the Honorable Secretary, were also involved in the Kindergarten Union. They also shared facilities for meetings, and student Kindergarteners from the Sydney Kindergarten Training College assisted in the nurseries. But from the earliest days there were clear distinctions made between the work of the two organisations. Jenkins, for instance, when referring to Sydney Day Nursery stated:

A new departure in our work followed naturally upon the opening of a Creche in Woolloomoolloo, which, while in no way officially connected to the Kindergarten Union, has kindly given our students the opportunity to learn in a practical way something of the care of very young children.⁶⁶

That Jenkins made such a categorical statement about Sydney Day Nursery being — “in no way connected to the Kindergarten Union” — seems to imply that she was trying to distance the work of the two institutions.

⁶⁵ ‘Kindergarten news’, *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 3 (2) (1912), 14 – 15, p.14.

⁶⁶ E. Jenkins, Annual report of the Kindergarten Training College, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, 5 – 11, p.6.

ProblematISING the Construction of ECEC as Saving Children

The construction of Sydney Day Nursery, and to a lesser extent Free Kindergartens, within nationalistic discourses as saving children of poor working mothers was problematic. First, work-related childcare was reinforced as a women's concern, as I discuss in more detail in the following chapter. Second, similar to the construct of rescuing children, the construct of ECEC as saving children, reinforced the idea that children were weak and vulnerable, a construct problematised in the previous chapter. Third, the construction of ECEC as saving children resulted in the creation of two distinct ECEC services. I discuss this separation below.

The construction of two distinct ECEC services, one based on a medicalised model of care, the other with an educational focus, marked the beginning of a care / education dichotomy in ECEC that, despite attempts at resolution, continues to this day. In Chapter Four, I discussed how the care / education dichotomy has been problematic for ECEC, I do not intend to reiterate those concerns here. Instead, I critically examine this historical legacy.

Why was it necessary for Sydney Day Nursery to emerge as an institution offering work related care? Why, for instance, didn't Free Kindergartens simply change their practices to better accommodate the needs of these women and their very young children? Kelly has suggested that Kindergarteners believed that the very young children, for whose needs the Sydney Day Nursery came to cater, were too young to educate. But this seems unlikely, given their statements about young children cited throughout this thesis. An alternative explanation may be that Kindergarteners considered that there were special

skills and knowledge that were required for caring for babies and very young children, for instance, in relation to feeding, that were far more in keeping with nursing than teaching. Given the high infant mortality and morbidity of the time it seems reasonable that Sydney Day Nursery should employ specialists in young children's health rather than educationalists.

Alternatively, perhaps Kindergarteners held philosophical beliefs regarding the primacy of the mother / child relationship that meant they were disinclined to offer work-related care for very young children. Kindergarteners were highly influenced by Froebel's pedagogy; and he had impressed that the mother child relationship was of utmost importance in the infant years. For instance, he stated:

The true mother, is loathe to let another put the sleeping child to bed, or to take from it the awakened child.⁶⁷

Indeed, much of the Kindergarteners' work was supposedly aimed at supporting mothers in their parenting role. Kindergarteners may have considered that non-maternal care for very young children would threaten the bond between mothers and their children.

Or perhaps, Kindergarteners were concerned that their work with young children may have been viewed with suspicion. As will be explored in the following chapter, the dominant ideology of motherhood assumed that mothers were the natural carers of young children. To have offered childcare so that mothers might work, even in the face of child neglect, would have threatened this ideology.

⁶⁷ F. Fröebel, *The Education of Man* (W. N. Hailmann Trans.) (New York: Appleton-Century, 1826 / 1885).

Yet, it seems incongruous that Kindergarteners, supposedly concerned with children's well-being, could close their doors mid-afternoon and, as mentioned above, turn young children back out onto the street without supervision. Indeed, Kelly criticises the Kindergarten Union harshly, saying that by failing to offer adequate childcare, "it betrayed its own welfare objectives."⁶⁸ So why didn't they stay open longer? One reason may be that Free Kindergartens were operating within the confines of existing educational practices. To change their hours of operation significantly, in order to accommodate working parents, would possibly have threatened their school-like appearance.

It was crucial that Free Kindergartens were constructed as educational institutions if they were to receive funding from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Government had not yet taken on a social welfare role, but the state responsibility for education had been enshrined with the Public Instruction Act. The Kindergarten Union's funding from the DPI might have been jeopardised had they operated as childcare facilities. Moreover, the Kindergarten Union had already 'pushed the boundary' by establishing schools that catered for young children, and it struggled to have its work seen as legitimate. To refer to the care of babies as 'education' may have threatened its educational status even further.

Another possible explanation for why Free Kindergartens did not change their hours of operation to offer work related care, may simply be because there were insufficient qualified Kindergarten teachers in Sydney to provide this care. Even as the years went

⁶⁸ J. Kelly, 'Not Merely Minded: Care and Education for the Young Child of Working Women in Sydney: The Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association, 1905 – 1945.' PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1988, p.24.

on, and the Kindergarten Union began to offer teacher education, only a small number of women entered the profession. Further compounding the teacher shortage was the policy that once a Director married she was required to resign. This meant there was a high attrition rate. Also, many Free Kindergartens relied on volunteer workers, and there was a limit to the amount of work that volunteers could be expected to do. Further, although student teachers assisted in the Kindergartens, they were also expected to study and so their time was limited. Moreover, as well as operating the Free Kindergartens, the Kindergarteners were also expected to conduct home visits, necessitating the closure of the Kindergartens in the afternoon. So there were a number of practical barriers preventing Free Kindergartens from offering extended hours work-related care.

The construction of two distinct ECEC services in Australia, one focused on care and the other education, has shaped ECEC since those early days. Critical historical analysis shows that this division was not inevitable or natural, but rather a function of the contemporaneous circumstances and discourses; as such it is open to change. A second way ECEC was constructed as national work was as a means of producing future productive citizens, as I explore below.

The Construction of ECEC within Nationalist Discourses:

Producing Future Productive Citizens

Those who advocated Free Kindergartens drew heavily on nationalist discourses to uphold their work. Newton, for instance persuasively argued that children were the future of the nation:

But it is to the little children that every nation must give its best thought, its greatest care, if it would keep its integrity. Its real wealth and power

do not lie within its Treasury, nor in the number of its armoured warships, but in the efficiency and character fibre of its men, women and children, and no other vital, growing thing in all God's universe requires such constant watchfulness, such carefully-adapted environment *from the very beginning* as character. This sounds trite, it is no new thought, but it is ceasing to be regarded as the emotional sentimentality of the impractical idealist. Real state-builders are recognising it as the vital principle of all civic power.⁶⁹

Children were constructed in Kindergarten Union documents as the saviours of the nation. For instance, a frequent message in these documents was:

Our hope for the future centres in the little children.⁷⁰

Children were considered to be the 'future' citizens who could add to Australia's prosperity:

[children are] ... the men and women of the future. True, they feel no responsibility yet, but in each heart lies a something — the embryo of the future, and a fair future, judging by the happy eyes and intelligent faces of every little one.⁷¹

As such, they were constructed as valuable 'commodities'. For instance, Anderson said:

Children are more valuable now than ever before in the history of the world, and Free Kindergartens need your help.⁷²

But childhood was a — "period of latent possibilities" — for both — "good or evil".⁷³

As such, children had the potential to both "retard" as well as contribute to the nation's progress:

In recognizing the child, not only as the child of to-day, but as the citizen of to-morrow, who will either add to or take from the nation's strength, forward or retard its progress, according to the way in which it is educated and trained from the beginning.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ F. Newton, Annual report of the Kindergarten Training College. *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904* [this was in fact an error it was 1904 – 1905], p.13.

⁷⁰ Formation not re=formation, (Circa 1910). From the Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell library.

⁷¹ D. G., 'The Kindergarten demonstration', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 3 (2) (1912), 5.

⁷² M. Anderson, 'What are you doing to help the little children', in M. Anderson, M Atkinson, J. Dane, H. Dumulo, Z. Benjamin, & E. Desailly, *Articles on Kindergarten* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, 1916), 5 – 6, p.6.

⁷³ R. L. Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899*, p.15

⁷⁴ M. A. Newman, 'Some phases in Kindergarten history', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 1 (4), (1911), 5 – 7.

Consequently, according to those in the Kindergarten Union, the nation could ill-afford to leave children to their own devices, but must instead ensure they were carefully watched, monitored and steered in the right direction. Free Kindergartens, it was argued, were valuable in this regard. According to Buckey:

In order to make these neglected ones valuable citizens, they must be developed by a system of education which will bring about organic results, and which will have a permanent effect upon the rising generation.⁷⁵

So, within dominant nationalist discourses, Free Kindergartens were constructed as important contributors to the building of an Australian nation. For instance, in *The Sydney Morning Herald* it was stated:

There was no Australian race or type of people; but no doubt there would be in course of time, and a great deal would depend upon the efforts of the present generation as to what class of people the future Australian race would become. They should endeavour to so mould it as to make it the very best type possible. The work of nation-building was a slow process. The kindergarten movement was an important factor in the work of the building up of a nation. ... each lady present should take charge of one of the children, or, if fractious might be allowed, even a half or a quarter of a child, and watch its progress, in order that such child [sic] might become a worthy unit of a great Australian people.⁷⁶

One can only wonder at how the “ladies” could be responsible for “half or a quarter of a child”!

Free Kindergartens, it was argued, would mould future generations of Australians.

Dumulo for instance said:

[Free Kindergartens] act as a force for good in moulding the character and directing the powers of the men and women of this State.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Buckey, Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899.

⁷⁶ Kindergarten School, Newtown, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 December, 1910, p.10.

⁷⁷ H. Dumulo, Report of the principal, Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1913 – 1914, p.14.

The garden metaphor was a particularly useful device. But it was not the picture of a flower naturally unfolding, as was evident in liberal / progressive discourses discussed in the previous chapter; within nationalistic discourses, a more managed horticultural vision was employed. Buckey, for instance wrote of ‘training’ these young ‘plants’:

Our efforts are constantly aiming to “incline” the twig into an upright, self-respecting tree.⁷⁸

Free Kindergartens were places of production, that would yield a crop:

The work of that dauntless and indefatigable band of pioneer workers and organisers who had cleared the ground and sown the seeds, and from the fruit of whose labours they themselves were even now profiting so largely.⁷⁹

The production ideology was prevalent both in the ways children were constructed and in the ways ‘industry’ was valorised in the Kindergarten Union texts.

Children are unconsciously taught that work is not a curse but a blessing. Nurtured in this atmosphere of loving thought for the first five or six years of life the impression can never be effaced and the children can never sink into the degradation possible for those who have been neglected.⁸⁰

These expressions are similar to those discussed in the previous chapter. However, within liberal / progressive discourses the focus was on children developing skills to improve their life-chances, whereas, within nationalistic discourses, the focus was on preparing children for future work for the good of the nation.

Indeed, it was proclaimed on the front cover of the Kindergarten Union Annual Report that:

Free Kindergarten work is political economy pure and simple, and National Prosperity is enhanced by it. It is a safe investment.⁸¹

⁷⁸ R. Buckey, A plea for Kindergartens, Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898, p.20.

⁷⁹ Anderson, ‘The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W’, p.2.

⁸⁰ Opening of the Free Kindergarten, Newtown, *The Dawn*, 1 March, 1898, p.12.

⁸¹ *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report*, 1899 - 1900, cover page.

Several 'trades' were covered in 'work periods' in the Free Kindergarten, such as, for instance, carpentry, bakery, tailoring and plumbing.⁸² Buckey stated that these trades were chosen:

Not only because they are most nearly related to this class of children, but to also lay a foundation of keen ambition to become skilled workmen and women (for the lack of it lies the secret of universal poverty) and to instil a true respect for all honest occupations.⁸³

Whilst the focus on these skills was perhaps understandable, it also highlights the limited view held by the Kindergarteners of what these children could become.

A further way that Free Kindergartens were constructed as nation building was through their work developing feelings of patriotism. Anderson, for instance, stated:

Love and duty are the ideal of the kindergarten, and patriotism is inculcated as a necessary part of right living.⁸⁴

Kindergarteners aimed to inculcate these ideals through overt symbolism. For instance, they hung a photograph of the King:

The patriotism of each young Britisher is being awakened by a fine large picture of His Majesty, King Edward.⁸⁵

They also sang the national anthem and made an oath to country:

Children will sing Kipling's Children's Song and "God Save the King," then will salute the Flag and make their oath of allegiance —
"I give my head, my heart, and my hands to my country."⁸⁶

⁸² R. L. Buckey, Suggested outline of work for kindergartens, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898*, p.33.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ M. Anderson, *The story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, circa 1912).

⁸⁵ F. E. Newton, Annual report of the Kindergarten Training College, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1905 – 1906*, p.8.

⁸⁶ Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, *Programme: Demonstration of Free Kindergarten work* (1912), p.2 [speech marks in the original].

Saluting the flag seemed to play an important role in the Free Kindergarten:

Nowhere in the Empire is the Flag more sweetly and heartily saluted than in the Free Kindergartens of New South Wales.⁸⁷

The flag took on particular significance during times of war:

First of all, we look at the flag which I had draped over the mantel, and we talked about the colours, their meaning, the message which they always carried to soldiers marching under them, the mental and physical effects and the significance of the war, the cause of the present war between the British and the Boers.⁸⁸

The following photograph of children saluting the flag (Figure 17 page 341), was used in several Kindergarten Union publications.⁸⁹ Its frequent use was perhaps to reinforce the public perception of Free Kindergartens as inculcators of patriotism, especially during the Boer and First World Wars. It is possible that this illustration of overt patriotism was considered especially important because of the diverse backgrounds of those involved in Free Kindergartens.⁹⁰

Given the patriotic fervour of the times, established earlier in this chapter, the Kindergarten Union may well have felt compelled to show how these institutions could contribute to the inculturation of Australian identity. Certainly, in the United States, assimilation of the migrant population into an 'American way of life' was considered an important element of Kindergarten work.⁹¹ It seems somewhat surprising, therefore, that whilst the idea of developing patriotic pride was evident in the Australian context, I

⁸⁷ M. Anderson, Honorary organising secretary's report, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1911 – 1912*, p.5.

⁸⁸ R. L. Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1899 – 1900*, p.12.

⁸⁹ M. Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney: Commemoration Address in 1913* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, 1914), p.16.

⁹⁰ Anderson, 'The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W'. As previously stated, Anderson suggested that the non-denominational nature of the Kindergarten Union was a possible reason for the lack of public interest and argued that this may have meant there was some difficulty for people to identify with the group.

⁹¹ K. Dombkowski, 'Will the real kindergarten please stand up? Defining and redefining the twentieth-century US kindergarten', *History of Education*. 30 (6) (2001), 527 – 545.

found no overtly racist statements in Kindergarten Union and Sydney Day Nursery documents; although it cannot be claimed that racism did not occur in practice.

Despite their displays of patriotism, the Kindergarteners struggled to explain the nature and purpose of war:

The little ones, many of whom had relatives in the various contingents, were gradually drawn away from the one thought of killing, which seemed to fill their minds, and helped to realise that the end and aim of war is not to slaughter, but the guarding and preservation of the freedom and rights of those in distress. The patriotic spirit was very much in evidence, and often blazed out in ways most unexpected.⁹²

It is distressing to think that early childhood teachers continue to have to deal with these issues today.

Like the social reform constructs of ECEC identified in the previous chapter those in the Kindergarten Union believed the effects of Free Kindergartens would extend into the homes and communities in which the children lived:

The introduction into the slum districts of far-reaching elevating influences which do not end with the children but are carried into the homes and brighten and purify the lives of the parents, thus affecting the whole community. The work of the Union might truly be said to be of national importance. Surely, then, it is not only kind, but wise and politic to begin as soon as possible to save the children — the men and women of the future ... by establishing free Kindergartens.⁹³

However, whereas within liberal / progressive discourses the focus was on reforming the impoverished areas inhabited by the poor, within nationalist discourses, ECEC was considered to have even greater influences that would benefit the nation:

⁹² J. Dane, Report of the Newtown Free Kindergarten for the year ending May 31, 1901, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1900–1901*, p.14.

⁹³ E. Davenport, Report of the committee, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1898–1899*, 9–11, p.10.



Figure 17: Saluting the flag, 1914. From the Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell Library.
Reproduced by courtesy of Kindergarten Union.

It is not only for the children of the slums that time and thought and money are spent, but for all Australia. What the Australian flag shall stand for among the flags of other nations in the future will depend upon the Australians of the future, and that depends entirely upon what is done for them today.⁹⁴

Problematising The Construct of ECEC as Producing Future Productive Citizens

The construction of ECEC within nationalist discourses as nation building was problematic. As discussed in Chapter Four, this construct tends to uphold the idea of ECEC as an investment, and children as commodities. It is a highly instrumental view, wherein ECEC is seen as a means of producing productive, compliant bodies. At the turn of the nineteenth century, this construct legitimated intervention into the lives of children, valorised compliance and possibly pathologised non-conformity. As well, it may have led to children being valued not for who they were but for what they were to become. Moreover, this construct evoked an image of the child as saviour, which although optimistic, not only placed a great burden on children's shoulders but may have inhibited systemic change.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, given the dominance of nationalist discourses at this time, the construction of ECEC as national work was an important way of focusing attention on the needs of children. If those in the Kindergarten Union and Sydney Day Nursery Association, had not drawn on nationalist discourses, they would have missed a valuable opportunity to legitimate their work.

⁹⁴ F. Newton, Sydney Kindergarten Training College, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1902 – 1903*, p.14.

⁹⁵ C. Hardyment, *Dream Babies: Child Care from Locke to Spock* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); C. Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860 – 1931* (London: Virago, 1990), p.66.

The Construction Of ECEC within Nationalist Discourses:

Crime Prevention

Advocates of universal education in NSW had long used the argument that education prevents crime. For instance, Black (M P) claimed:

Every tendency towards education is a tendency towards lessening the disposition to criminality.⁹⁶

Likewise, *The Dawn* cautioned that without education, children posed a threat to society:

Look again at all the little ragamuffins selling newspapers. Most of them do nothing else and they do not go to school. They are getting the worst possible training, but society will take no note of them until they are vicious enough to be be [sic] dangerous. If only for the future safety and comfort of the community we ought to capture, control, and educate all these small outcasts.⁹⁷

Similarly, one letter writer to the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald* argued that schools provided a valuable service by:

... keeping young children off the streets and away from the contaminating influence of those who unfortunately are born criminals.⁹⁸

The earlier these children were 'captured' and intervention could begin to steer them away from vice, the better. As one correspondent to *The Sydney Morning Herald* put it:

If we are to deal effectively with the larrikin pest, we must go to the nurseries.⁹⁹

As Maybanke Anderson was to later argue:

If we want to become a race of great men and noble women, we must begin education of the right sort as soon as conscious life begins.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ R. J. Black, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, 6751.

⁹⁷ Cruelty to Children, *The Dawn*, 5 August, 1890, p.18.

⁹⁸ Citizen, School age attendance at our public schools, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 August, 1893, p.3.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ M. S. W., Women workers: The children's nurse, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 December, 1898, p.4.

Anderson, writing in *The Dawn*, explicitly advocated ECEC as an important means of intervening early in children's lives to prevent them from growing up to become criminals:

We retain all our lives the habits of our earliest years, or we go through the costly and troublesome process of re-formation, reformation. Why has this process such a wonderful attraction for people who see little or nothing in formation? The charitable public and the ruling powers shower guineas on reformatories. There are societies to cure the drunkard and to lift the fallen, to encourage the debased and to reform the criminal, but few, very few, to begin at the very beginning, so that children may not grow up to lead dissolute lives. We are like people who stand with lifebuoys and ropes always ready to drag out of the water our children who are drowning because we never thought of teaching them to swim. A little farther up the stream there is a structure we call education into which they have all been huddled. ... Should not common sense if nothing else, invite us to try formation of character by early care and education rather than re-formation?¹⁰¹

In the above statement, Anderson clearly says "early care and education" is an important tool for preventing crime — but it was Free Kindergartens, in particular, that were constructed as crime prevention, rather than Sydney Day Nursery. Buckey, for instance, argued:

They [Free Kindergartens] are the surest preventative to lives of crime. It is a trite saying that "to form is better to reform," but the forming process must begin at the very beginning. It is just as much the duty of a nation, and as greatly to the public interest, to educate its embryo citizens from three to six as from six to sixteen.¹⁰²

In Free Kindergartens, it was claimed, children would learn:

... self-governing law-abiding citizenship.¹⁰³

And they would appreciate the benefits of abiding by the law:

The principles of the Kindergarten are life principles, and all through the year we have striven in every possible way to arouse the spirit of gentleness, of loving kindness and thought for others. The children have

¹⁰¹ M. S. W., Women workers: The children's nurse, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 December, 1898, p.4.

¹⁰² Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, p.10 – 11 [speech marks in the original].

¹⁰³ Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898*, p.21.

learned that law and order must prevail in order that the general comfort and happiness might be assured.¹⁰⁴

For instance, it was claimed children would learn obedience through playing organised games:

Organized games take the place of undisciplined recess, and while providing a time of relaxation are also a means of inculcating many social virtues — gentleness, fairness, and obedience to law.¹⁰⁵

But the ultimate goal of the Free Kindergartens was for children to learn self-governance:

So must we have an education for our nation that will teach each child to discipline itself.¹⁰⁶

For within the Free Kindergarten it was argued that:

Every child becomes the captain of his own ship, and takes his stand to the steering wheel.¹⁰⁷

The Kindergartener's aim, then, was that children would be taught to control themselves, thus negating the need for external forces. Presumably, in this way children would grow into law abiding citizens.

Moreover, those who advocated Free Kindergartens claimed that the children most likely to grow up to become criminals could be identified:

Dr Carroll spoke of the opportunities afforded to the kindergarten teacher for detecting criminal tendencies and devoting attention to the counteracting of such tendencies.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ J. Dane, Report of the Newtown Free Kindergarten for the year ending 1899, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899*, 12 – 15, p.12.

¹⁰⁵ Kindergarten Union of New South Wales *Programme: Demonstration of Free Kindergarten work* (1912).

¹⁰⁶ L. De Lissa, 'The social aspect of Montessori work', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*, 4 (2) (1914), 3 – 6.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p.104.

¹⁰⁸ A Free Kindergarten at Newtown: A successful inauguration, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 February, 1898, p.3.

Free Kindergartens could then intercede early, before the child had time to develop 'criminal tendencies':

The theory underlying the system is that the mind is best cultivated before it can acquire harmful predilections.¹⁰⁹

In this way, advocates of Free Kindergartens claimed they could break the inter-generational links that were supposed to exist between children and their criminal parents:

They will do as their parents did before them, and the generation of vice will never cease, for they have no higher ideal, and without a vision, the people perish. Why should we not cease to manufacture criminals? ... Policemen and lock-ups, magistrates and gaols, are all very expensive. ... Why do we not economise, and at the same time save the body, soul, and spirit of the little child?¹¹⁰

Once again, it was the children of the poor who were considered to be at greatest risk of becoming criminals:

In many a back street little children are growing up, ill nourished in body and mind, developing all the qualities that will make them idle, dissolute, dishonest, discourteous, ready as time goes on to fill our reformatories and gaols, and fit for nothing else. Shall we let them go to waste, while we talk about immigration, or shall we save them for their native land, and make them an asset more valuable than our gold or our wool, honest industrious citizens.¹¹¹

In these last two statements, Anderson in her typically flamboyant style, teeters between engendering sympathy for the 'poor' child, and outright scaremongering, in order to attract donations for the Kindergarten Union. These statements thus highlight how the construction of ECEC as crime prevention reinforced negative constructions of children as dangerous, an idea I address further on in the problematising section that follows.

¹⁰⁹ Free Kindergarten schools: Visit to the Woolloomooloo school, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 September, 1897, p.4.

¹¹⁰ M. Anderson, 'What are you doing to help the little children', p.6.

¹¹¹ M. Anderson, Organising secretary's report for year ending with July 1907, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1906 – 1907*, 3 – 5, p.5.

One person particularly responsible for the construction of Free Kindergarten as crime prevention was Buckey. Buckey frequently reiterated that it was much more effective to prevent children from growing-up into criminals than try to correct them later. A major contribution from Buckey was the connection she made between crime prevention and money saving. She used these financial arguments when lobbying government for funding, stating:

One reason for asking for State assistance was that they were preparing the children for the public schools, and were preventing them from growing up into criminals, as many of them would otherwise do if left in the streets in their early years. Money spent by the State now in helping the movement would mean less money spent in the future in connection with the gaols. During 15 years 14,000 children had passed through the kindergarten schools of San Francisco, and only one of these had been recorded has [sic] having been subsequently put in prison.¹¹²

Buckey was a shrewd advocate for Free Kindergartens. Rather than relying merely on unsubstantiated opinion, she frequently employed statistical 'evidence' from the United States to support her contention that Free Kindergartens saved money. She believed the statistics provided incontrovertible, rational, economic arguments for the financial benefits of Free Kindergartens. She stated:

The ways and means [to prove Free Kindergarten's 'worth'] is by a process of statistical, nude, aggressive facts.¹¹³

Buckey claimed for instance:

In New York, one family of paupers, over a 75 year period, cost the State £280, 000, whereas to support a Kindergarten for 60 children for a year would cost a mere £250.¹¹⁴

She also claimed that in Chicago, since the establishment of Free Kindergartens:

The number of children sent to the reformatory institutions has shown a marked decrease.¹¹⁵

¹¹² The Kindergarten Union: Deputation to Mr Garrad, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 February, 1897, p.3.

¹¹³ Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898*, p.20.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid*

Employing the emotive vernacular of the era she argued:

Every larrikin boy or girl reclaimed saves the colony many thousands of pounds ... We must endeavour to *prevent* crime, not *cure* it.¹¹⁶

At a time when discourses about national prosperity were dominant, Buckey operated to construct Free Kindergartens in a way that upheld these dominant ideologies; much as is the case today, as I discussed in Chapter Four. This money saving aspect of ECEC became a dominant theme within Kindergarten Union documents for several years. For instance, Anderson argued in 1911:

There is no doubt that in an ideal government, there would be a Free Kindergarten, within the reach of every child likely to be neglected. It is neither kind nor economical to allow children to become larrikins and criminals, for crime costs as much as an expensive luxury and ought to be a cause for shame.¹¹⁷

And De Lissa continued to uphold this argument in 1914:

The social value of such education is inestimable, for it will make it possible for the nation considerably to decrease the very large sums at present necessary for the maintenance of law and order.¹¹⁸

It appears, however, that even when employing financial arguments in an attempt to engender sympathy, attracting funding for Free Kindergartens remained an uphill battle.

A kindergarten needs much less money than an asylum or a hospital, but many will give cheerfully for reformation of health and character, who will not give for formation of both at the time when such formation is easy. ... We know that a stitch in time really and truly does save nine, but we want someone else to pay for the needle and thread.¹¹⁹

A certain frustration is evident in the texts:

Some day, when the nation is groaning under the weight of its burden of the sick, the helpless, and the unemployed, it may awaken to the fact that this burden will never be lightened, rather will grow heavier, until more is done to help people help themselves. Then, and only then, will it dip

¹¹⁶ Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898*, p.21 [emphasis in the original].

¹¹⁷ Anderson, 'The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W', p.22.

¹¹⁸ De Lissa, 'The social aspect of Montessori work', p.5.

¹¹⁹ Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney: Commemoration Address in 1913*, p.12.

into its money bags and help make it possible for every little child to have an early and fair start towards good and useful citizenship.¹²⁰

So, perhaps aligning with crime prevention discourses was not as effective as the Kindergarten Union would have liked.

Problematising The Construction of ECEC as Crime Prevention: Upholding the Construct of Children as Dangerous

As discussed above, the construction of Free Kindergartens as crime prevention tended to uphold the construct of children as dangerous, ‘unproductive citizens’, and a burden on society. This sentiment is evident in the following quote from Anderson:

The physical injury a child may thus sustain reacts mainly on himself and his family; but the moral and mental bias which he receives from continual contact with the vicious habits and manners of the mean streets is not only an injury to himself. It may cause him to be all his life a troublesome disgrace to his fellow, and a burden to his country. ...We are allowing our children to become idlers and wastrels, when we might easily make them good citizens.¹²¹

Moreover, the children for whom Free Kindergartens catered were constructed as threats that might ‘contaminate’ other, more ‘innocent’, children.

They become centers of infection in our schools, spreading vicious knowledge among the innocent. And as time passes they become, despite our belated efforts, larrikins and criminals, and help to fill our asylums and our prisons.¹²²

The Kindergarten Union highlighted how the children of the poor would eventually attend public schools and come into contact with other children.

Small and apparently unimportant items in the population of a great city, cannot be neglected without danger to the body politic. They must enter the public schools in due course, and by imparting their corrupt

¹²⁰ Jenkins, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, p.8.

¹²¹ M. Anderson, Honorary organising secretary’s report, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1912 – 1913*, pp. 6 – 7.

¹²² Formation not re=formation, (Circa 1910), no page number. From the Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell library.

knowledge to children from purer homes, must become centres for the dissemination of moral and social disease.¹²³

Thus the children of the poor were constructed as a potential threat to all citizens, not just those who lived in the poor suburbs.

In this way, as Steedman suggests, the working-class child came to “represent corruption” and “danger and impurity”.¹²⁴ So whilst the Kindergarten Union may have had the best intentions of poor children at heart, it nevertheless, served to construct them as ‘other’. Moreover, the construction of poor children as dangerous permitted and advocated physical control over their bodies. It could be argued that the construction of Free Kindergartens as crime prevention advocated the removal of poor children from the streets to institutions where they could be monitored and controlled. As such, Free Kindergartens established not only physical boundaries but boundaries of acceptable behaviour within which children were compelled to operate.

There is also a problem with Buckey’s emphasis on a relationship between ECEC and money saving, in that it sets a precedent for arguing that ECEC is valuable only if it saves money. This argument may have resulted in setting standards of care in terms of economic outcomes rather than in relation to humanistic concerns. For instance, there would have been no incentive to improve conditions beyond those that had economic benefits. So, whilst the construction of Free Kindergartens as saving money might have been a useful strategy, the founding of ECEC on such grounds is dubious to say the least.

¹²³ Anderson, *The story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds*, p.13.
¹²⁴ Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain*, p.67.

Conclusion to Chapter Nine

In this chapter I outlined the rise of nationalist discourses evident in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia, and I showed how children were constructed within these discourses as both valuable assets and dangerous. I then argued that within nationalist discourses, ECEC was constructed as: (i) saving children; (ii) producing future productive citizens; and (iii) preventing to crime. I also highlighted the problematic nature of these constructs.

Why did those advocating Free Kindergartens and Sydney Day Nursery construct ECEC within nationalist debates? We cannot say whether or not they believed that ECEC saved children, contributed to the building of the nation, or prevented crime. But it does seem that they were aware that the construction of ECEC in this way would add to their legitimacy. Newton, for instance, admitted:

A high ideal, a common purpose, an unwavering faith, is always enough to make even a small body a power in the community; but, when added to this is the leverage which one may count upon: in finding in the average man and woman love of country, and love and pity for forlorn and helpless childhood, such a power will be invincible.¹²⁵

It is likely, therefore, that the construction of ECEC as national work reveals a pragmatic streak in those advocating ECEC. Although their ultimate aim may have been to afford — “every neglected little child the opportunity for at least a fair start in life” — their advocacy had to be tied to dominant discourses of the day.¹²⁶

Perhaps, also, the construction of ECEC as national work was reinforced by advocates because it gave status to ECEC workers. Such a construction meant these workers were

¹²⁵ F. E. Newton, Kindergarten Union Annual Report of New South Wales, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, 6 – 11, p.11.

¹²⁶ Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, p.15.

no longer 'merely' concerned with the day-to-day care and education of young children, rather they had a political role in that they were responsible for building the future generations of Australians. This was a role they seemed happy to adopt, judging by a statement of a visitor to the Kindergarten demonstration they chose to record:

God bless the kindergarteners they are making the future.¹²⁷

Such a construct gave women an important role in an otherwise male dominated world.

It is to this final construct of ECEC, as women's work, that I turn next.

¹²⁷ D. G., 'The Kindergarten demonstration', p. 6.

CHAPTER TEN:

ECEC CONSTRUCTED AS WOMEN'S WORK

In this chapter I explore the construct of ECEC as 'women's work'. As discussed in Chapter Four, contemporary ECEC is constructed as both work performed *by* women and done *for* women. It would be easy to simply assume that the historical establishment of ECEC was 'naturally' women's work. It is, after all, women who bear children and who have, throughout history, had the prime responsibility for caring for them.¹ Yet, the 'great' philosophers of ECEC and those who established early childhood education settings up until the 1890s, at least according to the written records, were male.² It is therefore, perhaps more surprising than it at first appears that those responsible for establishing ECEC in New South Wales were women. It is possible to imagine that events could have been otherwise. So how did ECEC come to be constructed as women's work? As illustrated in Figure 18, I argue in this chapter that changing discourses of womanhood in the late nineteenth century created spaces where ECEC as women's work could emerge.

I begin the chapter by exploring two dominant gendered discourses apparent in the nineteenth century — 'essential woman' and 'new woman' discourses. These discourses were not mutually exclusive, but rather served to uphold one another in many ways. In contrast to previous chapters, where my focus was on the ways children were constructed within dominant discourses, in this chapter I focus on the dominant constructs of women that emerged within these two discourses. I show how essentialist

¹ E. Cox, 'Pater-patria: Child rearing and the state', in C. V. Baldock, & B. Cass (eds.), *Women, Social Welfare and the State in Australia* (2nd ed) (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 190 - 204.

² For a history of ECEC see for example: S. J. Braun, & E. P. Edwards, *History and Theory of Early Childhood Education* (Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones, 1972); 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).

discourses constructed women as fundamentally different from men, as primarily concerned with the home, and as the natural carers of young children. As such, essentialist discourses reflected middle-class family ideals that confined women to the private realm of the home. Conversely, new woman discourses were concerned with women's franchise, education and employment, and constructed women as valuable contributors to the body politic.

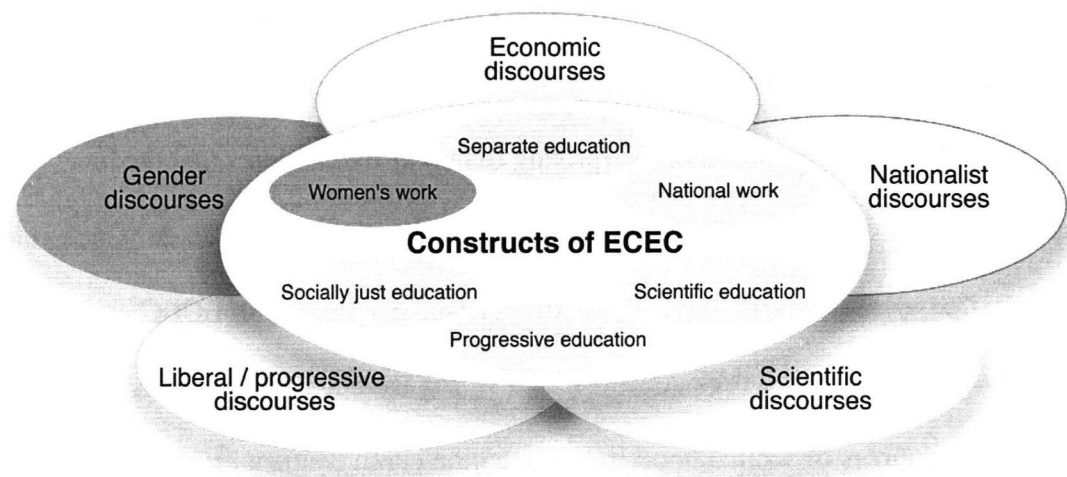


Figure 18: The construction of ECEC as women's work within gender discourses.

I argue that essential woman and new woman discourses created spaces where several constructs of ECEC as women's work emerged as: (i) legitimate employment for women; (ii) education for women, both professional and mother education; and (iii) work for the benefit of women. I go on to problematise these constructs and highlight how power operated through class structures. Notwithstanding these concerns, I conclude the chapter by arguing that we should value the substantial capacities of the middle-class women who established ECEC. Compelled to operate within the existing discursive environment, they nevertheless were able to envision a service that was valuable not only for themselves but also for their working-class 'sisters'.

Essential Woman Discourses and the Construction of Women

In Chapter Four I introduced contemporary feminist literature which has highlighted the ways women are constructed as essentially 'different' to men, and how these constructs can be confining for both women and men.³ Examination of media reports in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries revealed the dominance of discourses of the 'essential woman' at that time. These discourses centred on constructing men and women as fundamentally different. For instance, in a "Health Lecture for Women" intended to teach women about their body and health issues relating to women, Mrs. Longshore Potts (M. D.) asserted:

Men and women were throughout the whole structure essentially different. In their enjoyments and in their ways of living there were so many differences between the sexes that she sometimes wondered that they could live happily together.⁴

Of particular concern, it seems, were the physiological differences between the brains of men and women, especially their relative sizes and different functions. For example, one report of a public lecture by Dr A. T. Schofield about the comparative brain power of men and women claimed:

The brain of a women as compared with that of a man is slightly greater in proportion, and certainly not less. Women, he said, were just beginning their race ... There were, however, essential differences in the minds of men and women, and anything in the nature of rivalry was "absurd".⁵

³ 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; 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; 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; 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).

⁴ Longshore Potts, Health Lecture for Women, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 July, 1893, p.3.

⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 November, 1906, p.5 [speech marks in the original].

Medical and scientific debates legitimised the idea of essential differences between men and women. The fact that women menstruated and bore children meant that women were thought weaker, of delicate health and more unstable than men.⁶ Similarly, evolutionary theory was used to rationalise men's so called supremacy over women.⁷

Within essentialist discourses, women were constructed as having special characteristics, peculiar to their sex, that suited them to their role in life as first and foremost wife, homemaker and mother. Speaking to women on the topic of "Ruskin's Ideal of Womanhood", one writer, a female graduate of Sydney University, proclaimed:

Our aim in life must be to be true and good women. ... We may not ourselves be doers in the world, but we shall to a large extent decide what is to be done and the way in which it is to be done. ... Is it not only in an atmosphere of love, such as is found within the home, that a woman develops in all true womanly qualities — moral strength, gentleness, calmness, patience, loyalty, and truth? If you believe this, then it naturally follows that you believe the home is woman's true sphere of labour, and to fit herself for that sphere should be every girl's aim.⁸

It was even argued that a women's role was merely to serve men:

Their business is to sweeten life for men and for each other, not to make life more profitable or more indolent; to tend and adorn the house. ... In working they diminish the possibility of being good daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers; and these are their true functions — not earning money.⁹

These essentialist discourses served to naturalise the practices of the recently emerged patriarchal middle-class family, in which husbands worked outside the home whilst their wives maintained the household. As such, these discourses constrained women's

⁶ S. M. Rothman, *Women's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

⁷ Science and Sex, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August, 1893, p.8; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 May, 1895, p.7. This argument was flawed because it put those characteristics typically considered male, such as detachment and rationalism, at the top of the evolutionary scale.

⁸ Ruskin's Ideal of Womanhood, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 November, 1893, p.10.

⁹ The Right of Women to Work, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December, 1893, p.6.

activities to the private realm of the home. Moreover, it could be said, the naturalisation of middle-class norms constructed alternative family practices as aberrant.

Importantly, it was mothers who were considered to be primarily responsible for the care and education of their children. For instance, in *The Dawn*, it was argued:

Let mothers stop their nonsensical complaints about the confining limits of their spheres and devote their time and energies to a cultivation of their own lives so that they may be fitted to train the children given into their care. Nothing requires greater wisdom than shaping aright the budding powers of human character. What higher work should mothers dream of than fitting their precious child for eternal life?¹⁰

Essentialist discourses valorised women's domesticity and motherly skills. For example, one edition of the *Australian Kindergarten Magazine* discussing domesticity, described the work of mothers as "genius":

Day with its rush and its hurry — its work and exactions over, and the various members of the family return once more to the home, of which the mother is the central point. She *should* be the presiding genius. For it does need a genius to manage a household — to rule a household as a kingdom.¹¹

In this way, it could be argued that essentialist discourses served to enhance the status of women as mothers.

The construction of women within essentialist discourses reveals a number of paradoxes, however. First, whilst mothers were valorised, a fear of mothers' influence was also evident in the historical sources. For instance, it was claimed that a mother's characteristics would be 'transmitted' to her children:

If the mother is loving, true, kind, affectionate and thoughtful, the child will follow the characteristics. If she be deceitful, cruel and ill-natured,

¹⁰ The Training of Children, *The Dawn*, 2 October, 1893, p.17.

¹¹ Danvers-Power, Creating an Atmosphere in the Household, *Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 4 (2) (1913), 13 [emphasis in the original].

her child will inherit and be guilty of these vices, often intensified in degree.¹²

In this way, not only would mothering have consequences for a mother's own children, but also repercussions for the nation as:

Every home is a work-room in the treasure house of the nation, and every nurse and mother makes or mars its wealth of living gold.¹³

As such, women were urged to display self-censorship and to be vigilant in not allowing their own 'defects' be passed onto their children. For, as it was said in *The Dawn*:

The mother can never be too watchful over her own conduct, and when she sees a fault in her child she should scan her own life and see if it be not a duplicate of her own.¹⁴

A second paradox is that although motherhood was valorised and even revered as important work for the nation, because it was seen as natural, very little practical help was provided for women in their role of mothering. Many women died in childbirth or as the result of terminating pregnancy and spousal abuse was commonplace.¹⁵ Furthermore, most women were financially dependent upon men and vulnerable to desertion, or their partners' ill health or death. Essentialist discourses then, despite valorising women, may have served to subjugate them. It was women who were to bear the cost of raising the next generation, both in terms of their physical health and material wealth.¹⁶ This leads to another paradox evident in the construction of women within essentialist discourses. Whilst motherhood was considered natural, there was

¹² The Right of Women to Work, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December, 1893, p.6.

¹³ The Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, *The Sydney Kindergarten Training College Prospectus* (Circa 1904).

¹⁴ The Right of Women to Work, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December, 1893, p.6.

¹⁵ The Government Vital Statistics for July 1893, for example, reported that there was "one death of a mother for every 150 births registered" (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 August, 1893, p.5). There were also numerous reports of 'strange' deaths of women — probably a euphemism for septicemia following illegal termination of pregnancy.

¹⁶ See A. Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Updated Edition) (South Yarra, Victoria: Penguin, 1994).

growing recognition in the late nineteenth century, that mothers' skills and knowledge were, at best, questionable and that they required formal instruction.

Concerns with mothers' supposed lack of childcare knowledge and its relationship to infant mortality and morbidity had been raised in the early 1890s:

The cause of it [infant mortality] is ignorance — ignorance on the part of mothers of how to take care of their infants ... the present-day young mother, especially among the poorer classes, seems only to know what not to do. When her darkness is lighted, there will be some hope for the children.¹⁷

As children came to be more highly valued within the nationalistic debates referred to in the previous chapter, concern with mothers' lack of knowledge increased. Coupled with this concern, the expansion of scientific knowledge had given greater appreciation of why children were becoming ill and dying. It was argued that mothers had little understanding of how best to care for their children. For instance, in an address to the Education Congress held in Melbourne in 1912, reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, it was said:

[Dr Edith Barrett] was struck by the utter lack of appreciation of scientific principles underlying household work, cookery, and the bringing up of children.¹⁸

Indeed, it was claimed:

Ignorance among mothers is well nigh universal.¹⁹

Perhaps more sympathetically, Benjamin, in a paper on infant mortality, said mothers should not be blamed for their ignorance, but instead professional advice should be

¹⁷ R. Arthur, The massacre of the innocents, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 December, 5.

¹⁸ A most important matter, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March, 1912, p.5.

¹⁹ A. Hanson, Children and their management [part 3], *The Dawn*, 1 February, 1901, p.17.

made available for mothers, in simple language regarding, for example, proper feeding of infants.²⁰ As such, education for mothers was advocated:

Again we must impress upon women the great necessity for their being trained for these duties. Each person who takes up a profession or trade, requires to be trained for it, and this necessity is universally recognized. But women are supposed to be born with a knowledge of how to feed and rear children, with what result we see around us every day.²¹

So, on the one hand women were considered naturally suited to caring for children, and on the other they were constructed as needing training for that role. Consequently, there arose, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, interest in organisations that could educate women in matters of the home and childcare.²² One of the most successful and enduring of these was the Mother's Union.²³ As will be shown later in the chapter, when Free Kindergartens were established they contributed to mother education by creating 'mothers' clubs'.

Essentialist discourses were resistant to change. They continued to construct women's place as in the home caring for children, despite women obtaining the vote in 1901 in NSW, and entering the paid workforce in ever increasing numbers. In 1905, in only the second edition of a 'women's page' to appear in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, it continued to be argued that a women's main role was as homemaker:

Mrs. Jackson admits that a woman can be a good housekeeper and also devote herself to society, philanthropy, athletics, sport, literature, or art. But housekeeping must be regarded as the important thing. When there

²⁰ S. O. Benjamin, 'Infantile mortality in New South Wales', *The Actural Society of NSW Ninth Session*, 1905, 81 – 85.

²¹ Hanson, *Children and their management* [part 3].

²² A. Hulbert, 'The century of the child: A history of American scientific child rearing', *The Wilson Quarterly*, 23 (1) (1999), 14.

²³ M. Hale, The value of mothers' clubs. *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*, 4 (2) (1913), 11 – 12, p.12; The Mothers' Union, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September, 1897, p. 3; The Mothers' Union, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December, 1898, p.4.

are children the writer grows more emphatic still. 'Even if she could write like Shakespeare the care of her children ought to come first'.²⁴

That these statements encouraging women to stay at home had to be continually reiterated reveals a certain anxiety. One may ask why, if it was so 'natural' for women to want to stay at home and mind the house and baby, was so much time and energy dedicated to maintaining this argument? The answer probably lies in the fact there was an alternative gender discourse emerging; that of the 'new woman'. This discourse was beginning to challenge the constraints placed on women and, in so doing, threatened not only male supremacy, but also the middle-class family ideal.

New Woman Discourses and the Construction of Women

Gendered discourses of the 'new woman' were evident in the media of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The term 'New Woman' was coined at the time to refer to a highly educated, politically active woman. New woman discourses centred on three issues; achieving the vote, female employment, and higher education for women.²⁵ Discussions concerning these issues pushed the boundaries of what it meant to be a woman in Australia. Whereas essentialist discourses aimed at keeping women at home, new women discourses attempted to raise the profile of women and move them out of the private and into the public world. But, as will be shown below, these discourses were not mutually exclusive, rather those advocating women's rights to vote, and to higher education and employment, called on essentialist ideas to uphold these arguments and so, in fact, served to uphold essentialist discourses.

²⁴ Housekeeping and the Nation, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September, 1905, p.5. This was only the second edition of the women's page to be printed. It became a regular feature from September 20, 1905 [inverted commas in the original]

²⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 August, 1893, p.8.

New Woman Discourses and the Franchise

The late nineteenth century marked a time when many women in NSW were fighting for the right to vote.²⁶ Many of those involved in women's suffrage through the Women's Suffrage League were also involved in the establishment of the Kindergarten Union. So these were highly politicised women.²⁷ Those operating within new woman discourses advocated women's right to vote as a means of gaining independence and freedom, as well as on the basis of natural justice.²⁸ For instance, Maybanke Wolstenholme (later Anderson and President of Women's Suffrage League of NSW) argued that women had an important role to play beyond the confine of their homes, husbands and children:

Woman is not born into the world for the sole purpose of making the life of the other sex agreeable, and reproducing the species.²⁹

Such expressions, however, were frequently ridiculed and lampooned, and women's attempts at becoming involved in matters of state were often derided.³⁰ Women were frequently told to concentrate on matters that concerned them; that is, the care of their husbands, homes and children. When arguing against the franchise for women, one letter writer to *The Sydney Morning Herald* argued rather patronisingly:

Marriage is the goal of woman's existence. ... Considering the stupendous cares of maternity and the physical weakness of women at most times of her life, is it prudent to load her mind with additional cares, or to attract her from the supremely important work of moulding

²⁶ The Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW was formed in 1891. Women's Suffrage, *The Dawn*, 1 July, 1893, pp.12 – 13; The Suffrage Movement of NSW. A Brief Review of its History, *The Dawn*, 1 May, 1902, pp.7 – 8.

²⁷ L. Tretheway, & K. Whitehead, 'Beyond centre and periphery: Transnationalism in two teacher/suffragettes' work', *History of Education*. 32 (5) (2003), 547 – 559.

²⁸ M. Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999).

²⁹ Wolstenholme, The Women's Vote, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 November, 1893, p.6.

³⁰ The issue of the woman's vote was a hotly debated topic. There were numerous letters to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Both pro and anti franchise letters were frequently grouped under the title of "the Woman's Vote Craze" which tended to trivialise the issues as a passing fad. See for instance: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May, 1893, p.5; Nicholson, Womanhood Suffrage League, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 June, 1893, p.3; J. Haynes, The Women's Vote Craze, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 November, 1893, p.12; N. Hawken, Woman Suffrage, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 November, 1893, p.6; A Woman and an ass, *The Bulletin*, 9 May, 1896, p.6.

the lives of the children entrusted to her tender and ever-necessary care?³¹

It is likely that the shifting boundaries of womanhood were viewed by some men as a threat to male identities. Their role was, after all, defined in relation to women. By changing ideas about women's roles and identities, men's identities were also challenged. The newspapers of the time tend to reveal a fear amongst some men. For example, one correspondent who was against the vote for women, argued that women would be more inclined to be conservative, and that they would:

... undermine the established institutions of society [to create] a system of gynæcracy.³²

Likewise, in a satirical piece it was said:

Men keep women in tyrannical subjection, because they know that if women had power as well as wiles they would make a clean sweep of the planet in a fortnight.³³

This piece seems to highlight a fear amongst some men that if women were given equal rights, men would be subjugated by women.

Given these fears, a particularly useful way for women to argue for their increasing participation in the public domain, without threatening men, was to use essentialist ideas that women had special skills, unique to their sex, which should be brought into the public sphere, in order to 'balance' the body politic and benefit humanity.³⁴ A number of correspondents to *The Sydney Morning Herald* used this argument, but unfortunately

³¹ J. Haynes, The Women's Vote Craze, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 November, 1893, p.12. Although women were presumed to be conservative, in fact, when women voted in South Australia and New Zealand they tended to vote for the "Democratic Cause". A Woman and an ass, *The Bulletin*, 9 May, 1896, p.6; Womanhood Suffrage League, *The Bulletin*, 15 June, 1893, p.3.

³² *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May, 1893, p.5.

³³ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 May, 1895, p.7.

³⁴ N. Hawken, Woman Suffrage, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 November, 1893, p.6.

it is not possible to identify whether they were male or female. One writer, for example, invoked a domestic image to argue:

Wherever the woman goes she sweeps the place clean so she is certainly wanted in politics.³⁵

Women's natural "love of children" and a supposed desire to be homemaker, were used to legitimate their concern with children's issues and nation building.³⁶ For instance, in *The Dawn*, in the 1890s it was stated:

This [children's issues] is a topic which all women may and should speak out in whatsoever way is open to them, for every uttered opinion adds strength to those who do the public work, and who have the power to effect legal changes. ... If women had been voters Parliament would have heard this long ago.³⁷

This 'natural' concern with children, then, was used by suffragists to argue that women should be given the vote. In this way, one correspondent to *The Sydney Morning* argued, because women were 'naturally' concerned with issues of the home and children, if they received the vote:

... there would be fewer divorces, and our children would be physically and mentally superior to the present generation.³⁸

Similar sentiments can be observed in a verse from Lawson's poem, *The Helpless Mother*:

The streets are filled with the snares that lurk
In the wayward children's path,
Yet people say that a woman's work
Is still by the homely hearth.
But stagnant air of the world is stirred
By the voice despised so long;
The woman's voice in the land is heard, —
The words of a strange new song.
We'll know the worth of a purer youth
When the women rule with men,

³⁵ From London, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 November, 1911, p.5.

³⁶ N. Hawken, Woman Suffrage, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 November, 1893, p.6.

³⁷ Cruelty to Children, *The Dawn*, 5 August, 1890, p.18.

³⁸ R. Summerfield, The Woman's Vote Craze, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 November, 1893, p.6.

For love of virtue and peace and truth
Shall save the world again.³⁹

The construction of women as having special characteristics was, therefore, a useful strategy for suffragettes. It shifted women's subjective position, making it possible to argue for women's increased participation in public life and their place in the political landscape.⁴⁰ As will be shown later, those establishing ECEC were also to call on these essentialist constructs to advocate ECEC.

New Woman Discourses and Female Higher Education

Those operating within new woman discourses advocated higher education for women on the basis that women had a right to intellectual advancement. The power of education in the fight for equality was also recognised. For instance, one letter writer to *The Sydney Morning Herald* wrote:

This division of the work is certainly very useful for man and has greatly assisted him to his position of power, and has pushed woman into the background.⁴¹

The writer argues that men, through controlling women's access to education, had stifled women.

Many middle-class women were so convinced that education was important for women that they began to organise educational groups solely for women; such as the Women's Literary Society, which offered a forum for philosophical debates and cultural and

³⁹ H. Lawson, 'The Helpless Mother', in C. Roderick, *Henry Lawson Collected Verse. Memorial Edition. Volume One 1885 – 1900* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson. 1981 / 1894), p.145.

⁴⁰ See S. Margery, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2001).

⁴¹ Science and Sex, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August, 1893, p.8; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 May, 1895, p.7.

social discussion.⁴² These organisations not only introduced middle-class women to new ideas; they also provided a public space for them to hear and express their ideas, and form networks where a broad range of intellectual, political and social issues could be discussed.⁴³ It may be that, within these organisations, middle-class women's locus of interest was moved outside their homes and into the public domain.⁴⁴ And perhaps it was here that many were first exposed to the plight of poor children and ideas about the role that they could take in addressing poverty.

There were those, however, who argued against women's higher education, claiming that higher education might have negative consequences for women, particularly in relation to their prospects of becoming wives and mothers. For instance, one article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* claimed that although:

... a certain degree of cleverness in women is not displeasing to men [women should not be over educated, as] the thoroughly intellectual female is probably admired rather than liked.⁴⁵

These were arguments that those advocating higher education for women, including early childhood teacher preparation, would have to overcome.

In the face of such opposition, many of those concerned with achieving higher education for women once again called on essentialist constructs to counter-argue that education would assist women in their roles as wives and mothers. That is, they claimed

⁴² Women's Organisations, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 March, 1910, p.5; Rothman, *Women's Proper Place*.

⁴³ G. E. Mowry, *The Progressive Era, 1900 – 1920: The Reform Persuasion* (American Historical Association: Washington, D. C., 1972); H. Murray, 'Great works and good works: The Toronto Women's Literary Club, 1877 – 83', *Historical Studies in Education*. 11 (1) (1999), 75 – 95; Rothman, *Women's Proper Place*.

⁴⁴ It is known, for instance, that Maybanke Westenholme was involved in several such women's groups, including the Women's Suffrage League and Women's Literary Society (J. Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1993).

⁴⁵ Should women be intellectual?, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June, 1893, p.6.

better educated women would make more companionable wives and attentive mothers.⁴⁶

I argue later that within these debates about the education of women, ECEC was constructed as a profession that not only offered higher education for women, but also prepared women for their roles as wives and mothers through 'mother education'.

New Woman Discourses and Female Employment

In the nineteenth century, many women moved from work within the home to employment outside the home.⁴⁷ Employment opportunities for women were severely restricted, however. Industrialisation had led to a marked sex role differentiation in employment and only a few occupations were open to women, including factory work, shop work and secretarial work.⁴⁸ Teaching was considered an acceptable profession for

⁴⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, may have been significant in the development of this idea. Wollstonecraft in the 18th century had argued that to be a good mother and wife, women needed to have an independent and rational mind (A. Cumming, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and her vindication of the rights of women', *Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society*. 1 (1) (1972), 12 – 23.

⁴⁷ P. Cook, I. Davey, & M. Vick, 'Capitalism and working class schooling in late nineteenth century South Australia', *Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society Journal*. 8 (2) (1979), 36 – 48.

⁴⁸ Factory work seems to have been particularly popular amongst women. B. Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1975); J. Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History* (London: Longman, 1988).

A Royal Commission of Inquiry into female employment in factories indicates how women's employment in this industry was considered a threat to society. It was argued, for instance, that employment of married women in factories "1. Is an encouragement to the practice of prevention. 2. It involves risk of miscarriage. 3. If a married woman has children, the necessary abandonment of breast feeding leads to an increase of infant mortality. 4. The day's energy is given up to the making of money in the factory to the neglect of the home. 5. The practice encourages idleness and extravagance in men. 6. the influence of married women with the unmarried girls is often far from good". A. B. Piddington, *Report of Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Hours and General Conditions of Employment of Female and Juvenile Labour in Factories and Shops, and the Effect on Such Employees* (Sydney: Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, 1912).

There were however, some shifts made in the types of employment open to women. By the end of the century, several occupations, that had formerly been exclusively the domain of men, such as shorthand writing and clerical work, were being carried out by women. Although the opposition to females taking on male positions could have been due to essentialist ideas about the types of employment in which women and men should engage, it may also have arisen from a recognition that males would be more likely to block women's employment if they felt threatened. Women's emergence in the public work place did indeed threaten male dominance. In some cases men left that profession. For instance, when women began to engage in short hand typing, rather than compete with women, the men simply left that employment. In other areas men were protectionist and restricted women's employment. For instance, although women were beginning to enter the medical profession, they were 'encouraged' to work with

middle-class women.⁴⁹ Moreover, employment was not seen as a career for women, but rather a temporary aberration until the 'right' husband came along.

In *The Sydney Morning Herald* in the early 1890s, there was an ongoing dialogue in the letters section, and in a number of articles, regarding women and work. This reportage focused on arguments for and against women undertaking work — or rather paid employment. For those operating within new woman discourses, women's employment was seen as an important aspect of women's rights. For instance, one letter writer to *The Sydney Morning Herald* argued that women had the right to work as they were not slaves.⁵⁰ There was also recognition that many women needed to work to support their families:

In these days it is needful for almost every woman to be able to earn her living. Whether it is that in the twentieth century we require more comforts and luxuries, pleasures, and excitements, than our grandmothers wanted, or that the necessities of life are more expensive than in other days, certain it is that women must work, and not only must they work to support themselves, but when we look round us, how many girls and women do we see who are helping support their parents, or who have the bringing up of their younger brothers and sisters, left solely dependent on them by the death of the father.⁵¹

Even amongst those who argued that the ideal was for women to stay at home, there were those who conceded it was permissible for women to work, if circumstances beyond their control, such as being widowed or deserted, conspired against them:

There surely are few who could deny their sympathy and aid to women of any walk of life who find themselves bereft of their breadwinners, be

women and children. Australian Economic Association, *The Economic Position of Women*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December, 1893, p.8).

Predominantly, it was considered undesirable that women should take on the work of men. Even Wolstenholme, whilst President of the Suffrage League, argued against women taking on male positions (Womanhood Suffrage League, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 June, 1893, p.3; Women's Work in 1905. By the Lady Knightly of Fawsley, *Women's Budget*, 13 March, 1906, p.4.

⁴⁹ Rothman, *Women's Proper Place*.

⁵⁰ The Right of Women to Work, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December, 1893, p.6.

⁵¹ F. L. G., How to Become a Teacher, *Woman's Budget*, 26 May, 1908, p.9.

it by death, or desertion, or sickness, and are consequently thrust into the struggle, often with young children dependent upon them.⁵²

It seems, however, that whilst those women compelled to work were “pitied”, those who chose to work were pathologised:

The married woman who is partly or entirely the bread-winner is perhaps the most to be pitied person in the community. In some cases it is her own choice, for, having been a factory girl or shop girl in her single days, home life does not appeal to her, and the daily cares of a household and family prey on her health and spirits. She, therefore, goes back to her work, and leaves the home to look after itself.⁵³

Similarly to those who argued against higher education for women, those who were against women working used essentialist ideas that women’s ‘place’ was in the home. Many letters claimed that a woman’s primary responsibility was as a wife, mother and daughter. Thus women should work:

... not for gain, or indeed outside their own houses [as this might lead to the] degradation of home life.⁵⁴

It was further claimed that paid work would ruin women’s countenance and therefore make them less marriageable.⁵⁵ For instance, it was contended by one writer that paid work was too physically taxing for women, hazardous for their health and furthermore, — “sours and depresses” — women.⁵⁶

Men most likely feared that women’s work would threaten their dominance over women. Working in paid employment could lead to women’s financial independence, making them less reliant, and therefore less subservient, to a father or husband. Unlike

⁵² The Right of Women to Work, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December, 1893, p.6.

⁵³ M. S., The Home of the Working Woman: Here and Elsewhere, *Woman’s Budget*, 2 April, 1907, p.9.

⁵⁴ The Right of Women to Work, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December, 1893, p.6
Womanhood Suffrage League, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 June, 1893, p.3.

⁵⁵ The Right of Women to Work, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December, 1893, p.6.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

women's engagement in paid work, however, their engagement in philanthropic work was actively encouraged.

The Construction of Women's Engagement in Philanthropic Work

As discussed in Chapter Eight, philanthropy was a feature of late nineteenth century Australia, and numerous charitable organisations were formed. Women from the middle-class were particularly prominent in these organisations.⁵⁷ It was claimed that many women were no longer content to stay at home but instead wanted to take a more active role in public life. As one writer put it:

There are few women to-day who are content to lead the lives of social butterflies. Many of them identify themselves with movements for social reform and with organization of a religious or charitable character.⁵⁸

Indeed, the 1892 Annual meeting of the Sydney Rescue Work Society, reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, stated that philanthropy:

... must be essentially a work of women. (Applause.) And in the reconstruction of society of which they heard so much in the social evolution towards a broader plane of humanity, it must be the women in the future who must do the great social re-creation, and the object of the elevation of women to her proper place was that she might be the great social and moral elevator of the future.⁵⁹

Within essentialist discourses, it was argued that philanthropic work could even enhance womanliness:

A lady ... renders help and service to those in need of ministrations. ... The woman, therefore, who aims at being a true lady must ever have before her three words of deep import — sacrifice, love, service — and must make them the basis of her action.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Women's Organisations, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 March, 1910, p.5; J. Roe, 'The end is where we start from: Women and welfare since 1901', in C.V. Baldock, & B. Cass (eds.), *Women, Social Welfare and the State in Australia* (2nd ed.) (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 1 – 19; See also J. Goodman, "'Disposed to take charge" British women and the management of female education, 1800 – 37', *Historical Studies in Education*. 11 (1) (1999), 59 – 74; M. S. Shapiro, *Child's garden: The kindergarten movement from Fröebel to Dewey* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983).

⁵⁸ Women Who Work, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 December, 1897, p.6.

⁵⁹ Sydney Rescue Work, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June, 1893, p.3.

⁶⁰ A. L., What the Word "Lady" Means, *Woman's Budget*, 21 May, 1907, p.21.

But philanthropy was also considered a diversion for women; a way they could expend their excess energy. For instance, a letter writer to *The Sydney Morning Herald* argued that women should not concern themselves with matters of state or employment but should instead concentrate on philanthropic work:

Let the woman of superfluous energies and time make a parliament of her home and a legislature of her own world of charity, there to lay the foundation of respect for the law and aspirations for noble and useful lives. Here is the field for woman's work. It throws not a weak woman on the world to face an unequal battle, but draws her to her strength. It adds no new competitive elements to the industrial world for men already weary to battle against, but rather saves and elevates the people, increases the opportunity for marriage, and aids the State in truly national work. To this all good and true women should subscribe their best energies. It is a world for women only — a world in which there are aye rewards of enduring renown, not the least of which is the undying gratitude of grateful men.⁶¹

Consequently, it was women who were expected to carry the burden of social reform — without remuneration. Moreover, philanthropic work was a way of keeping women out of the competitive world of commerce. Instead of competing with men, philanthropic work would divert women from fighting for equality. Whereas a woman could 'sacrifice' herself by working with young children as part of her philanthropic duty, to do so for financial gain was actively discouraged.

Nevertheless, philanthropy offered women an important way of entering into the public world. It was a sphere of work in which women were seen to have legitimate interest, and where they could exercise some power. The construction of ECEC as philanthropic work no doubt made it possible for many women to participate and gain positions of authority they might otherwise not have attained.

⁶¹ J. Haynes, The Women's Vote Craze, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 November, 1893, p.12.

The Construction of Women's Engagement in Teaching

As previously stated, teaching was one area of employment that was open to women. Indeed, since the establishment of the NSW colony, women had been involved in teaching in private and church schools, often with their husbands, as governesses, and later in the public school system.⁶² In particular, teaching was considered an appropriate employment for middle-class women. Women teachers were largely restricted to teaching in the first years of school, however.

Teaching in the early school years was not highly regarded. For instance, Suttor (Minister of Public Instruction) said:

... teachers of a lower classification are capable of teaching [children in the younger years].⁶³

So women teachers tended not to achieve high recognition. Furthermore, they received considerably less pay than their male colleagues.⁶⁴ For example, in the early 1890s in the public school system, male pupil teachers received £3 a month whilst females only £2.⁶⁵ Moreover, women teachers' positions were far more tenuous than those of male teachers. As noted in Chapter Five, during the 1890s economic depression, when there was pressure to curtail public spending, it was primarily the female teachers' salaries

⁶² M. L. Walker 'The Development of Kindergartens in Australia.' MEd thesis, University of Sydney, 1964. For a detailed discussion of teaching as women's work in South Australia, see K. Whitehead, *The New Women Teachers Come Along: Transforming Teaching in the Nineteenth Century*, Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society Monograph Series Number 2 (Sydney, University of Sydney, 2003).

⁶³ F. B. Suttor, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6722.

⁶⁴ This appears to have been a feature of female employment in the nineteenth century. Rickard and others undertaking Marxist analyses in the 1970s and 1980s have argued that women's employment was exploited (see Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann*; Rickard, *Australia*; Rothman, *Women's Proper Place*).

⁶⁵ Appointments in the Department of Public Instruction in 1892, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 August, 1893, p.4.

that came under scrutiny. For instance, in Parliamentary debates, the following statement by Alexander Hutchinson about female teachers' pay went unchallenged:

It is monstrous to pay £30 or £35 a year to women to teach children. I think that the highest value that can be put on female labour of that kind is £20 per annum.⁶⁶

When Suttor reduced expenditure in the Department of Public Instruction by retrenching teachers and cutting their salaries, it was women teachers who bore the brunt of this cost cutting, losing up to thirty percent of their salaries.⁶⁷ So employment in the public school sector tended to marginalise women teachers, not only by trivialising their work with younger children, but also by treating women teachers as a dispensable workforce.

Teaching, nevertheless, offered women a valuable opportunity to enter into the public world.⁶⁸ The construction of ECEC as a new field of teaching, exclusively for women, was an opportunity to create acceptable employment for women, in which there was no competition from men, where women would be in control, and which, perhaps, offered more reliable and secure tenure.

To summarise so far, I have argued that essentialist discourses constructed women as fundamentally different from men and as especially concerned with the care of the home and children. Whilst these constructs of women might have created difficulty for women who wished to take a more active role in public life, those women endeavouring to enter the public world used these essentialist arguments to their own advantage. In particular, new woman discourses, which advocated women's engagement in public

⁶⁶ A. Hutchinson, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p. 6759.

⁶⁷ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 July, 1893, p.5.

⁶⁸ Rothman, *Women's Proper Place*.

life, their access to higher education and their right to work, tended to call upon essentialist constructs to legitimate women's engagement with issues regarding the care and education of children. These gender discourses created a space in which ECEC could emerge as women's work in multiple ways.

The Construction of ECEC within Gender Discourses:

Legitimate Employment for Women

Within gender discourses, the care and education of young children had been constructed as a legitimate area of concern for women. Those who established ECEC shifted this 'private' essentialist construct of women as mother and homemaker out of the home and into the public sphere. ECEC, it was argued, was simply mothering and homemaking taken a little further.⁶⁹ In effect it was 'national mothering'.⁷⁰

Within essentialist gender discourses ECEC was constructed as work that should be performed by women, as only they had the requisite qualities:

The professional success of a kindergartener depends upon the quality of her womanhood and upon her actual equipment in all womanly occupations.⁷¹

Indeed, the possibility of a male ECEC teacher was not considered in the historical texts.

⁶⁹ This is a paraphrase of a comment in a letter to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, under the heading The Right of Women to Work, in which teaching was referred to as "the tending of the house carried a little further" (26 December, 1893, p.6.).

⁷⁰ Lake (*Getting Equal*) refers to women's increasing involvement in social issues as the creation of a "maternalistic welfare state" (p.49).

⁷¹ The Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, *The Sydney Kindergarten Training College Prospectus* (Circa 1904), p.13.

The establishment of ECEC created a new area of employment open only to women that would provide them with financial rewards:

Parents as well as their daughters are beginning to realise the benefits of a thorough Kindergarten training. It not only puts into their hands the power to win their bread in a womanly way, but at the same time provides the means for a broad and general personal culture.⁷²

It seems that those entering the profession were almost guaranteed employment. For instance, in the prospectus for The Sydney Kindergarten Training College, Nursery Kindergarten Course it was claimed:

In the homes and nurseries of Australia there is continual and increasing demand for competent, intelligent assistance.⁷³

Similar sentiments were expressed in the texts of The Sydney Norland Institute. The Institute opened in 1908:

To meet the increasing demand for trained ladies as Children's Nurses, and to provide the necessary training for a profession which is eminently suited to women who have a natural sympathy with young children.⁷⁴

The Norland Institute prospectus stated that there was a huge demand for trained nursery nurses:

It [nursery nursing] is one of the few careers open to women where the demand exceeds the supply.⁷⁵

Likewise, the annual report of the Kindergarten Union for the year 1905 – 1906 stated that there was a 'market' for governesses, and the Kindergarten Union was keen to provide training.⁷⁶ So it seems there were plenty of employment opportunities for women wishing to work with young children. It appears, however, that this work was not necessarily well remunerated:

⁷² F. Newton, Annual report of the Kindergarten Training College. *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904* [this was in fact an error it was 1904 – 1905], 7 – 15, p.13.

⁷³ Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, *The Sydney Kindergarten Training Course* (1911).

⁷⁴ The Sydney Norland Institute, *Prospectus* (1911), p.7.

⁷⁵ *ibid*, p.7.

⁷⁶ Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, *Kindergarten Union Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, p.6.

Until, however, the position is better paid, there is small inducement for any young women to take such a course, and we must earnestly ask the co-operation of our friends in securing a living wage to those who take up this work. As it is, the sum offered is less than that paid an untrained housemaid, while the quality of service extended is much higher.⁷⁷

Why did women choose such positions if they were so poorly paid? As previously suggested, ECEC work offered women secure employment prospects. Unlike positions in the public education system, positions in ECEC were only open to women, and so there would have been little threat of being challenged by male teachers. But more than this, work with young children was constructed as beneficial for women. It was argued, for instance, that employment within ECEC would give meaning to a young woman's life:

There is here scope for the independent girl or woman who wishes to do something with her life, outside the trivialities of the social round.⁷⁸

It would also protect women from a valueless existence:

For a young women to have reached the age of thirty and have no definite object in life, is conducive to all sorts of bodily and mental ills, as any physician well knows. If for no other reason, it seems only fair that we should safeguard our girls against such a possible condition.⁷⁹

Further, work in ECEC was constructed as giving women an opportunity to have control over their practices. For instance, Elizabeth Jenkins of Sydney Kindergarten Training College made the assertion:

I do not know of teachers anywhere who are working with a freer hand than our Directors.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ E. Jenkins, Annual report of the Kindergarten training college, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, 5 – 11, p.6.

⁷⁸ M.S.W., Women workers: Some tenders of babies, *Women's Budget*, 11 December, 1906, p.9.

⁷⁹ Jenkins, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, p.8.

⁸⁰ E. Jenkins, Personal Correspondence to Sydney Kindergarten Training College, August 7, 1911. From Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell library.

Considering the times, the opportunity for women to manage their own work would have been highly unusual and refreshing, although, of course it cannot be assumed that these women were truly autonomous.

The role of the ECEC teacher was also constructed by those within the field as having a significant role in society. In particular, the work of transforming individual children was revered. Just like 'good mothers' caring selflessly for their children, the Kindertgartener's role in moulding future citizens was valorised:

The Director of a Free Kindergarten or Playground has no mean office. She stands at the fountain head of character, she prepares for the future, children who, untrained in right-thinking and in love, must inevitably become a menace to the community. The ideals she sets before the children, the habits she encourages, the truths she enforces, the very words she uses in her lessons to them, will remain inherent parts of their memories long after her personality is forgotten.⁸¹

Similarly, those advocating ECEC considered the children's nurse an important contributor to society, because of her role in the formation of children's character.

Among women workers the children's nurse ought to occupy a most important place. ... The children she cares for will be either the good citizens or the larrikins, either the lawmakers or lawbreakers of 30 years hence. Upon them and their work the fate of the nation will depend, upon their health the continuance of the race, upon their character its moral advance or degradation. The effect of her teaching and her example will last through generations, her habits will be copied long after she herself has passed away, and her manner of speech may echo through centuries.⁸²

But more than this, the role of the Kindertgartener was constructed as giving women the opportunity to have a far-reaching influence on society:

⁸¹ M. Anderson, *The Story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, circa 1912), p.14.

⁸² M. S. W., Women Workers: III – The Children's Nurse, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 December, 1898, p.4.

Teachers realise that they are social servants set apart for social ends; they are not merely makers of men, but makers of society, and so ushers in the true kingdom of the future.⁸³

These ideas were tied to nationalist discourses, referred in the previous chapter. It was claimed, for instance, that the Kindergartener would use her womanly and mothering skills to benefit the nation:

With conscious, steady purpose they are fitting themselves to do for their country what a woman may, some of them with a spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion not excelled even by their red-coated brothers on the battlefield.⁸⁴

Furthermore, through their work in ECEC, it was claimed teachers would gain satisfaction in the knowledge that they were engaging in 'improving' the world:

They have found the delight of service, and for the rest of their lives they will know that the training of the child is the natural work of the women, and they will look on that as the best possible preparation for the betterment of the world.⁸⁵

Specific examples of the ways Kindergartners operated beyond the scope of the Kindergarten were publicised within Kindergarten Union documents:

Through the efforts of this young woman [a kindergartener], food was procured for their immediate needs, the new quarters found, and they were moved into them, work was obtained for the father, the eldest boy, an invalid, was placed in Walker's Hospital, and money enough solicited to buy sweets, needles, pins, to stock a little shop in one corner of their tiny home, to catch the stray pennies in the neighbourhood. Is it any wonder that despair took flight, and happiness and hope once more took possession of this man and woman? Is it any wonder that they love the kindergarten and the kindergarteners? Is it any wonder that the kindergarteners are devoted to their work, when such things are possible? Or that they, too, can say: "Who would be an angel when she can be a kindergartener?" it is work the angels might envy. It is much to make little children happy.⁸⁶

⁸³ L. De Lissa, 'The social aspect of Montessori work', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 4 (2) (1914), 3 – 6, p.6.

⁸⁴ Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, p.9.

⁸⁵ M. Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney: Commemoration Address in 1913* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, 1914), p.16.

⁸⁶ F. E. Newton, *Kindergarten Union of New South Wales Annual Report, 1903 – 1904*, 6 – 11, 10 [speech marks in the original].

Similarly to the construction of teachers within liberal / progressive discourses, Kindergarteners were constructed as self-sacrificing 'saviours'. Madonna-like:

[Kindergarteners] radiate a blessed atmosphere, for which the world will be the richer and better.⁸⁷

Likewise, Newton proclaimed the Kindergarteners were:

... daily giving themselves to the task of rescuing, guiding and protecting future citizens of a great nation ... they have been called "Angels of the State".⁸⁸

So the ECEC practitioner was constructed, at least in the professional documents, as not only as having power within the ECEC setting but also beyond in the social domain. For women who may previously have felt confined to the home, the thought of being able to influence the social world beyond must have been particularly alluring.

Moreover, the founders of the Kindergarten Union were often idealised by others within the Kindergarten movement. Anderson sang high praises of the (American) women who were responsible for establishing the Sydney Kindergarten Training College:

It is impossible to estimate the value of the labours of these three American women. They were not only experts in kindergarten methods, anxious to train for education's sake, three different types of womanhood, they became beloved friends of the students, ready to advise in any difficulty, and always at hand to point to the highest ideal. The intimate personal sympathetic work which the Directors of the Free Kindergartens of Sydney now do among their "mothers" naturally, and without consideration, owes in great measure its inception to the philanthropic idea of kinship with the needy, which came to us with our American trainers.⁸⁹

Similarly, Dane, praised Francis Newton, saying her three years of leadership of the Sydney Kindergarten Training College were characterised by:

⁸⁷ E. Jenkins, The Sydney Kindergarten Training College, *Kindergarten Union of New South Wales Annual Report 1906 - 1907*, 5 – 11, p.9.

⁸⁸ Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, p.9.

⁸⁹ M. Anderson, 'The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W', in Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, *The Story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, 1911), 18 – 29, p.26 [speech marks in the original].

A fearless spirit, an ever-present faith, and a practical achievement which brought about a larger recognition of the value of the cause she was advancing. Her plea for a higher standard of excellence, for completer womanly training on the part of the Kindergarten student, and for an enlarged course of training and experience, began to be understood and appreciated.⁹⁰

At least in the circles of those interested in ECEC, these women received public recognition. Perhaps this is why so many of those involved in the establishment and work of Free Kindergartens and Sydney Day Nursery gave their time gratis.⁹¹ Many of the helpers in the Free Kindergartens, such as Jeanie Dane, and all those on the Boards of both the Kindergarten Union and Sydney Day Nursery were volunteers. Indeed, when calling for assistance in their work, these organisations rallied:

... philanthropic ladies with leisure on their hands.⁹²

The benefits of work within ECEC, however, seem to have been restricted to middle-class women. Teaching was constructed as requiring the qualities of a gentlewoman. For instance, when the Kindergarten Union established the Sydney Kindergarten Training College, only the “refined” were accepted:

Young women wishing to enter the Free Kindergartens to be trained as Kindergarteners must satisfy the Committee that they have received a fairly good education, are able to play and sing simple songs, speak clearly, and are of refined and gentle habits.⁹³

It was argued:

⁹⁰ J. G. Dane, ‘A brief outline of the development of Kindergarten training work in Australia’, in Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, *The Story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, 1911), 30 – 38, p.36.

⁹¹ The patrons were often society women such as Lady Dudley (*Kindergarten Union Annual Report, 1908 - 1909*). Sydney Day Nursery had a ‘circle of helpers’ who contributed to the upkeep of the nursery. Some provided clothes, others sponsored a cot, yet others worked on numerous fundraising activities, such as, jumble sales, bazaars, ‘at homes’, afternoon teas, and an annual ball. A comprehensive list of donations is included in every Annual Report. These donations vary from cash to food, toys and equipment. For instance, in 1908 it was recorded that a Mrs Fairfax donated children’s cloths (old), curtains and a pram (old). E. Zlotkowski, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1910 – 1911*, p.7.

⁹² M.S.W, Women workers: Some tenders of babies, *Women’s Budget*, 11 December, 1906, p.9.

⁹³ Requirements for admission as students into the Kindergarten, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898*, p.36.

The teacher must have high qualities of character before she is fit to undertake this work, and in the prosecution of it she gains as much as her pupils. She must give unremitting attention, her patience and cheerfulness must never flag, she must love children or she cannot reach the child's heart and draw out the Divine spark which is latent there.⁹⁴

It is unlikely that working-class women would have been considered to possess such qualities. Moreover, Buckey stated quite categorically:

It is from the most cultured classes that our teachers should come.⁹⁵

Buckey did, however, believe that Kindergarten training would be useful for all girls as will be shown further on.

Further upholding ECEC as a middle-class occupation was the financial status of the Sydney Kindergarten Training College. Because the college was self supporting, the Kindergarten Union had to charge students for their training. This meant excluding those too poor to pay. Even though a bursary was established, by Mrs Stanger Leathes, only one 'needy student' could be supported without paying. Vetting practices ensured that only a particular sort of womanhood gained entry into Kindergarten teaching. Employment within Sydney Day Nursery was, perhaps, a little more open. Although the matron had to be trained, the helpers in Sydney Day Nursery 'merely' had to be young girls with 'sympathy for children'. But, in general, positions of authority were only open to middle-class women.

Problematising the Construct of ECEC as Legitimate Employment for Women

The construction of ECEC as legitimate work for women served to perpetuate gender role segregation and uphold the patriarchal system that disadvantaged women. The

⁹⁴ Opening of the Free kindergarten, Newtown, *The Dawn*, 1 March, 1898, p.12.

⁹⁵ R. Buckey, Report of the Woolloomooloo Kindergarten for the year 1898 - 1899, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 - 1899*, 11 - 18.

construction of ECEC as naturally a woman's concern, based on "traditional gender norms of nurturance", upheld the essentialist idea of woman as the 'race producer' and placed the responsibility for child rearing on women.⁹⁶ Whilst it may be argued that the construct of ECEC raised the profile of motherhood, as Summers points out, the valorisation of mothers at the turn of the century was a "sham" as motherhood had no real power.⁹⁷ As previously argued, women not only bore the cost of producing and caring for children, they were kept subjective and dependent on males.⁹⁸

Similar concerns have been raised by Goodman in relation to British women's involvement in education in the British and Foreign Society. Goodman claims these women:

... built their argument that work in education was appropriate to their sex, on a view of familial relations that took into account women's legal, economic and social disabilities in wider society. In a world in which men held legal, economic, and social power and women had no civic status, such claims to authority in education upheld the gendered relations of power they were to redress.⁹⁹

In the same way, the women who established ECEC in NSW may have confined women's role in the public world within clearly defined parameters and as such reduced women's career options and prevented them from taking positions of power.¹⁰⁰ So, although women may have considered the construction of ECEC as women's work gave them power, this power may have been illusory.

⁹⁶ Roe, 'The end is where we start from', p.129.

⁹⁷ Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, p.72.

⁹⁸ See also Cox, 'Pater-patria'.

⁹⁹ Goodman, "'Disposed to take charge" British women and the management of female education, 1800 – 37', pp.71 – 72.

¹⁰⁰ M. Clyde, 'The development of kindergartens in Australia at the turn of the twentieth century: A response to social pressures and educational influences', in R. Wollons (ed.), *Kindergartens and Cultures: The Global Diffusion of an Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 87-112.

Likewise, the construct of the teacher as 'saviour', whilst appearing to revere women, may ultimately have served to undermine them, as it enticed women to commit untold hours of free labour to an organisation that would have national benefits. By giving freely of their time, these women continued to uphold the notion that women's work was a form of sacrifice, rather than financially motivated, and consequently, may have contributed to the marginalisation of female employment. As noted in Chapter Four, Duncan argues that the dominant construct of the early childhood teacher working selflessly for the good of children continues to have repercussions for early childhood practitioners today.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, ECEC gave women the opportunity to influence their social world. Whilst essentialist constructs constrained women, they also permitted a new vision of womanhood in which women could take a more active role in political and social life.¹⁰²

According to Brosterman:

The women who flocked to preach the kindergarten gospel eagerly grasped the opportunity to make what they hoped would be substantive, societal improvements for children and themselves, from two of the few acceptable power positions open to them — early childhood education and young motherhood.¹⁰³

ECEC enabled women to demonstrate how their involvement in a project could contribute to the betterment of society. As Clyde points out, not only were ECEC workers teachers and carers, they also had to learn how to chair meetings, communicate effectively with parents and the wider community as well as manage tight budgets.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ 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.

¹⁰² See also S. Margarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2001).

¹⁰³ N. Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten* (New York: Harry N Abrams, 1997).

¹⁰⁴ Clyde, 'The development of kindergartens in Australia at the turn of the twentieth century'.

So, at the very least, the establishment of ECEC offered an opportunity for women to demonstrate their organisational and management capacities.

Yet, the construction of ECEC as legitimate employment for women brought with it a danger of trivialising the care and education of children as a natural tendency within women, not requiring any special skills, other than being a woman. A further debate within new woman discourse, that of higher education for women, had, however, given rise to the idea that higher education was necessary for women in order for them to improve their mothering skills. Within this discourse ECEC was constructed as education for women.

The Construction of ECEC within Gender Discourses: Education for Women

Two dominant themes of ECEC as women's education are evident in the historical documents: (i) professional education; and (ii) mothers' education.

ECEC Constructed as Professional Education for Women

Despite the essentialisation of the care and education of young children as naturally a woman's concern, from its earliest days those involved in the establishment of ECEC constructed the care and education of young children as a profession that required specialised preparation through higher education:

A kindergartner should be not only gifted with great love for children, she should be trained for the work.¹⁰⁵

It was not enough to simply have a love of children, teachers must also understand children's development:

¹⁰⁵

Anderson, *The Story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds*, p.15.

The 'gardener' of the little human plant should understand the nature of that which is being trained and know exactly what means to use for its development.¹⁰⁶

It was argued that only through higher education could women develop this understanding of how to 'properly educate' young children. For instance, Professor Anderson of the University of Sydney, a strong advocate for Kindergarten methods, was quoted by Maybanke Anderson (his wife) as having said:

In the hands of properly-trained teachers, Kindergarten work is simply the best means of developing in a scientific way the powers and capacities of the little child.¹⁰⁷

It was not only early childhood teachers who were considered to require higher education, but also children's nurses.

The "tender of babies" is to speak of a class of employment which, in the Commonwealth, is as yet only in embryo, but which, as our city passes from slumland into garden-city land, will increase, until bands upon bands of earnest young women will be required as probationers, and as they are certified, into professional "tenders of babies".¹⁰⁸

As well as training in the physical care of the child, such as feeding and bathing, it was also considered important for the nurse to understand the mind of the young child:

Then as to its [the child's] mind? She would certainly have to learn first of all to understand her own mind and its workings. She will have to watch the actions of the child, those actions will be the result of the child's emotions, and she will herself control those emotions while she consciously or unconsciously gives him, or helps him to develop his ideas. She must learn that she is going to build character. The child's energies are feeble, his emotions are easily aroused, she will be able to wake into activity every capability for good. He will respond to her touch more subtly than the most delicate musical instrument to the hands of a master, and she may start him on the narrow path of pure idea and sweet emotion, which will widen into broad expanse of good and noble life; or she may wake in him anger, envy, malice, falsehood, emotions and capabilities that might otherwise have slumbered, and so develop his worst possibilities that he may become a criminal and an outcast. Important as is the care of the body, and no sensible person would

¹⁰⁶ Opening of the Free kindergarten, Newtown, *The Dawn*, 1 March, 1898, p.12 [inverted commas in the original].

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, 'The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W', p.28.

¹⁰⁸ M.S.W, Women workers: Some tenders of babies, *Women's Budget*, 11 December, 1906, p.8 [speech marks in the original].

undervalue it, we ought to insist that our nurses should have at least elementary instruction in the science of the mind.¹⁰⁹

The study of children's minds, then, was considered especially important to assist nurses to direct children's thinking and transform them into 'upright' citizens.

Contradictorily, it was also argued that whereas the matron had to be a trained nurse, others working with very young children were not required to be qualified:

While the matron will always need to be a highly-trained nurse, it is not absolutely necessary that all those engaged in the work should have received hospital training, as the duties in the crèche under skilful direction will be of a nature to teach the general management of babies. In no work, it is true, is there more need of a "vocation," yet any kind, cheerful, warm-hearted girl, with love of children and a readiness to submit to discipline, would be suitable for training.¹¹⁰

Given previous statements about the importance of professional training for children's nurses it is somewhat incongruous that Sydney Day Nursery Association employed untrained staff to care for children, even if they were under the management of a nurse. It perhaps reveals a tension between the ideology of professionalism in ECEC, and the pragmatic day-to-day realities of running an economically viable and affordable ECEC service.

The construction of ECEC as professional work created a discursive space in which specialised teacher training facilities could emerge. Although a teacher training college existed within the public system, the Kindergarten Union considered it essential to educate teachers in their particular interpretation of Kindergarten, and teacher training became an integral feature of its work right from its very inception.

¹⁰⁹ M. S. W., Women Workers: III – The Children's Nurse, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 December, 1898, p.4.

In the early days, Kindergarten teacher education was focused on Fröebel's teaching.

However, when Buckey arrived from the United States in 1895, she argued:

Higher credentials are demanded of his nurse and teacher.¹¹¹

Buckey called for a more systemic course of training for ECEC teachers, and subsequently, the Sydney Kindergarten Training College (SKTC) was established where:

... girls could be taught the care of children and the best means of attending on them.¹¹²

An important aspect of the SKTC was that student teachers were encouraged to live communally in the College residences known as Fröebel House.¹¹³ Communal life formed an important part in the professional preparation of the Kindertgarter. Its purpose was to provide students:

... with a wholesome and refined atmosphere, and to give them personal responsibility and practical experience in domestic affairs – cooking, marketing, table-laying, serving, carving, presiding, house-decoration, bedmaking etc. Emphasis is also placed on the ethics of family life, consideration for others being the keynote of daily living.¹¹⁴

Within Fröebel House, the young women were taught 'womanly' skills:

Aside from the daily practical experience in house-keeping and home-making, the House students are fast growing into habits of promptness and orderliness, neatness and daintiness, poise and self-control, virtues only outshone by their thoughtfulness, courtesy and consideration for the comfort and happiness of the whole household. They govern themselves, and an ideal of all-round true womanliness from the practical, ethical, and æsthetic points of view is in the atmosphere, every member of the household seeming to have no other thought than to make it real as far as she is able.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ M.S.W, Women workers: Some tenders of babies, *Women's Budget*, 11 December, 1906, p.8.

¹¹¹ R. L. Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1899 – 1900*, p.11.

¹¹² Kindergarten Union, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 August, 1895, p.3. See Chapter Seven, p.244 for details of SKTC.

¹¹³ J. G. Dane, 'A brief outline of the development of Kindergarten training work in Australia', in Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, *The story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, 1911), 30 – 38.

¹¹⁴ The Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, *The Sydney Kindergarten Training College Prospectus* (Circa 1904).

¹¹⁵ Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, p.12.

As can be seen from the photograph on the following page (Figure 19) of a house-meeting, Fröebel House was a picture of early twentieth century domesticity.¹¹⁶

Perhaps the construction of Kindergarten teacher education as also domestic training was considered an important way to increase their number of enrollments; or make it acceptable to parents so that they would allow their daughters to attend. It is interesting to note that although attending a meeting, many of the women in this photograph are also busily engaged in needlework, perhaps to reinforce the idea that women's political interests could coexist with their domestic lives.

Fröebel House, offered women an opportunity to live together in a spirit of collegiality. It may therefore have provided them with a safe space to discuss issues and ideas that may ordinarily have been 'out of bounds' or considered 'radical'.¹¹⁷ Indeed, it was argued at the time, that along with preparing women for their future responsibilities as mothers and wives, ECEC teacher training would also prepare women for their responsibilities as New Women:

And I [Francis Newton] believe that, next to the establishment of Kindergartens, no greater service could be done this community than to aid in the support of this phase of the work, to educate along these lines and with definite and conscious purpose the young women, the mothers of the Australia that is to be; to train them to recognise the fact that with the new duties and responsibilities which the franchise entails, there also comes the need for larger ideals, for a loftier conception of an intelligent,

¹¹⁶ The Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, *The Sydney Kindergarten Training College Prospectus* (Circa 1904), p.20.

¹¹⁷ It is known, for instance, that Maybanke Anderson was an advocate for sex education (Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*). We can speculate that such matters were topics of discussion within Fröebel House.



The fortnightly House-Meeting at Froebel House, where the practical matters of the home and its ideals
are freely discussed.

Figure 19: House-meeting, Froebel House, circa 1904. From the Kindergarten Union archives,
Mitchell Library. Reproduced by courtesy of Kindergarten Union.

strong, capable, self-disciplined, loving, generous, gracious womanhood.¹¹⁸

That there might have been a political aspect to Kindergarten teacher education cannot be dismissed, especially considering many of those who established the Kindergarten Union were also involved in women's rights issues.

Despite the attempts of those within ECEC to construct the care and education of young children as a skilled profession, the public perception of the work of ECEC may have been somewhat different, as several sardonic pieces in the media seem to suggest. For instance, Margaret Hodge, who gave lectures at Sydney Kindergarten Training College, lamented in *The Australian Teacher*:

So long as the sensational idea prevails that the love of children is enough to make anyone an admirable kindergarten teacher, and so long as the kindergarten is regarded in the light of a place of amusement during an interval between the nursery and the school, instead of being a continuation of the one and the introduction of the others, so long will all those who really value education look askance at the Kindergarten.¹¹⁹

Similarly, M.S.W. (probably Maybanke Selfe Westenholme), wrote in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

The ordinary person still thinks that anybody can mind a baby. One of the commonest conclusions of the mother of working girls is that the useless, empty-headed girl of the family will do for a nurse. The daughter who is clever with her hands can be a dressmaker, the girl who makes a good school record shall become a pupil-teacher and later a school mistress, the girl with good address and a nice appearance can get into a shop, but Cinderella with awkward hands, unhealthy physique, no beauty, and no brightness is only good enough to take a situation at a few shillings a week and be a nurse-girl.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Newton, *Kindergarten Union of New South Wales Annual Report, 1903 – 1904*, p.7.

¹¹⁹ M. Hodge, *The Australian Teacher*. 1 (36) (1899), pp.5 – 6. Margaret Hodge, along with Harriet Newcombe, are significant figures in the development of Kindergarten in Australia. They taught in the SKTC as well as established the kindergarten 'demonstration' school 'Shirley' (M. Munro, *Shirley: The Story of a school in Sydney* (Shirley Old Girls' Union: Sydney, 1967).

¹²⁰ M. S. W., Women Workers: III – The Children's Nurse, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 December, 1898, p.4.

Notwithstanding public skepticism, those within ECEC constantly strove to reinforce the need for trained teachers in ECEC:

All thinking people agree that a few months' training is a travesty upon Kindergarten, and thoughtful parents will decline to place their children in the hands of untrained teachers. One of the great needs of Australia to-day is a complete system of Free Kindergartens taught by well-trained teachers. Other nations realise that their prosperity depends largely upon this important factor, shall Australia prove an exception?¹²¹

Interestingly, the statement above encourages parents to make their ECEC choices on the basis of the staff qualifications, similar inducements are made today.

In the face of public skepticism about the need for teacher training for ECEC, those advocating professional preparation for ECEC once again relied on essentialist ideas to support their arguments. It was suggested, for instance, that teacher education would not only prepare women for working with young children, it would also enhance — “womanly faculties”:¹²²

... developing in all that goes towards the making of a noble woman; self-poised, enthusiastic, reliable, generous in service, with keen sense of orderliness, harmony, and beauty.¹²³

It was frequently claimed that Kindergarten training would prepare women for their role as wives and mothers:

Best of all the young woman who has studied them [Kindergarten methods] will be not only a trained children's nurse, with a definite profession, and constant employment if she desires it, but she will have prepared herself to be a model mother and nurse of her own babies.¹²⁴

It was even argued, in keeping with the notion of the national mother, that Kindergarten training in homemaking would be useful for the nation:

¹²¹ R. Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1898 – 1899*, p.8.

¹²² Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, p.10.

¹²³ Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899*, p.17.

¹²⁴ M. S. W., Women Workers: III – The Children's Nurse, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 December, 1898, p.4.

To educate and train the home-makers of a nation is the shortest and surest pathway to the prosperity and well-being of the nation.¹²⁵

The education of young women in the skills of home-making reflected a shift in female education. No longer could homemaking be left to women to acquire ‘naturally’ — it had to be taught:

The change in thought that is taking place in regard to the education of girls is one of the most interesting developments in modern education. Briefly it is this — a girl’s education from her teens up should be centred around the home idea. Not that there should be a radical change in the subjects taught, but that the teacher should relate them to some phase of home making, not just house-keeping, but the larger idea of the home which includes housekeeping. Now this work is the very work we are doing in our Kindergartens, in our class work, and in our home life at Fröebel House. ... I think that the day will come when you will point proudly to this work as a pioneer effort in Australia to educate girls for this higher work of womanhood. And as these girls go out year after year imbued with these ideals which will make for the dignity and beauty of home life, I think that you will come to realize that where you have set out to benefit little children only, you have been the means of getting in motion influences that will make for the stability and purity of the home life of this great new country.¹²⁶

Perhaps the construction of ECEC teacher training as preparing mothers and homemakers was to counter fears about women’s supposed movement away from motherhood, sparked by the decline in the birth rate discussed in the previous chapter. This fear may account for Anderson’s startling claim that women’s work in establishing playgrounds might:

... perhaps incidentally increase the birth rate.¹²⁷

ECEC Constructed as Mother Education

The second theme of ECEC as women’s education evident in the texts is ‘mother education’. Shortly after Free Kindergartens were established, “Mothers’ meetings” or a

¹²⁵ Newton, *Kindergarten Union of New South Wales Annual Report, 1903 – 1904*, pp.7 – 8.

¹²⁶ Jenkins, Personal Correspondence to Sydney Kindergarten Training College,.

¹²⁷ M. Anderson, ‘Play and playgrounds’ [A paper reprinting an article in the Sydney Daily Telegraph of July 4 & 8, 1914] p.10. From the archives of Kindergarten Union, Mitchell Library,

“Mother’s Club” were organised.¹²⁸ Initially, mothers’ meetings were designed for the working-class mothers whose children attended the Free Kindergarten, and they aimed to not only inform mothers about the Kindergarten method, but also to create a bridge between the Free Kindergarten and the children’s homes.

Our Mother’s’ Meetings are intended to establish a closer relationship between the Kindergarten and the home lives of our children. The benefit then is mutual. If we know something of their home influences, environment and hereditary tendencies, we are better able to meet the peculiarities and effects of the children under our care, Our mothers as well as our children need teaching, and it is the aim of this branch of Kindergarten work to insure the interest and co-operation of the parents in order that the work which we are trying to accomplish with their children may not be lost, but emphasized by explaining to them by means of a series of plain, practical talks on hygiene of the care and training of children.¹²⁹

There is only limited evidence about the content of these meetings but they were said to cover issues such as child development and childcare practices.¹³⁰

As time moved on, however, it seems that the ‘mother education’ offered by the Kindergarten Union became a service for wealthier mothers who could afford to pay the — “£1 1s quarterly” — to attend the courses offered by the Kindergarten Union.¹³¹

Harriet Dumulo, Principal of the Sydney Kindergarten Training College, said classes for mothers had been formed:

... at the request at various times of young Mothers who felt the need for some knowledge of Child Study. ... lectures; ten in all are given on child study, which includes children’s punishments and children’s literature, the hygiene and teaching of sex, occupations for little children, and Fröebel’s ideas on the teaching of religion, also on the home as an educational influence.¹³²

¹²⁸ Anderson, *The Story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds*, p.3.

¹²⁹ Mothers’ Meetings, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report*, 1898 – 1899, p.25.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ Course of study for mothers, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report*, 1899 - 1900, p.27.

¹³² H. Dumulo, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report* 1913 – 1914.

The reference to “teaching of sex” is intriguing. Unfortunately, however, no further details are given.

Problematizing the Construction of ECEC as a Women’s Education

The two constructs of ECEC as professional education and mother education, are problematic. As highlighted above, the professionalisation of ECEC created a hierarchy of those involved in the care and education of young children, with those with qualifications at the top. In this way, positions of power were created for middle-class women that may have served to subjugate the mainly working-class women who worked as untrained staff.

Nevertheless, for middle-class women, the professionalisation of ECEC created opportunities for them to access higher education. Moreover, it gave a select few women the opportunity to work as teacher educators within Sydney Kindergarten Training College. It would have been difficult to secure such positions in other higher educational establishments at this time.

The construction of ECEC as mother education underscores a problematic paradox raised previously. On the one hand, mothers were constructed as being the natural carers of children, uniquely equipped with special skills and characteristics to care for and educate young children. On the other hand, they were constructed as requiring special training. No longer could this important role of mothering be left to the vagaries

of a haphazard female socialization; now mothers had to be taught to be “professional mothers”.¹³³

The focus on mothering within the Kindergarten Union upheld the idea that mothers were responsible for their children, wherein mothers could be blamed for any supposed ‘deficits’ in their children, and wider social causes were apt to be ignored. This concern would have been particularly salient for the poorer mothers. For instance, merely educating poor mothers to eat nutritious and healthy food would have done little to address the poverty that led to maternal mal-nourishment, a major cause of infant mortality.¹³⁴

Nevertheless, a genuine empathy from middle-class ECEC professionals towards working-class women cannot be discounted. Many of the women involved in the establishment of ECEC would no doubt have lost children in infancy themselves. Maybanke Anderson, for instance, had seven children but only three reached adulthood.¹³⁵ It would seem reasonable to assume that these women were sympathetic to the concerns of poor women, and might want to do something to assist mothers in their role of parenting. Were it not for these women advising mothers on childcare, perhaps many more children would have been victims of ignorance. It seems, however, that it was middle-class mothers who might have had most access to mother education. So perhaps the Kindergarten Union was simply adding to the knowledge of those already advantaged by wealth in the same ways they do today, as I argued in Chapter Four.

¹³³ C. Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860 – 1931* (London: Virago, 1990), p.83.

¹³⁴ M. Gilding, ‘Theory and History of the Family: A Case Study: Sydney from the 1870s to the 1930s.’ MEd thesis, Macquarie University, 1984.

¹³⁵ Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*.

The Construction of ECEC within Gender Discourses:

Work for the Benefit of Women

The final construct of ECEC identified in the historical sources is ECEC as work done for the benefit of women. ECEC was constructed as benefiting women through both its childcare function, and its work in supporting women in their mothering role.

In the previous chapter, I showed how within nationalist discourses, childcare was constructed as a means of ‘saving’ children. Within gender discourses, childcare was also constructed as having benefits for women. The Sydney Day Nursery Association, in particular, was established primarily to provide work related childcare for ‘needy mothers’ who, because of family circumstances, were working to support themselves and their families. As specified in their “Regulations for Parents”, Sydney Day Nursery Association had strict guidelines for assessing parents’ eligibility to use the service. For instance, regulations 1 and 2 state:

1. All mothers wishing to leave their babies at the Day Nursery must give satisfactory proof to the House Committee that they are earning their living.
2. It will be necessary for them to bring a letter of recommendation from a responsible person, showing that their case is a genuine one.¹³⁶

What constituted a “genuine” case, and a “responsible person” is not stipulated. However, with a shortage of places, it seems reasonable that Sydney Day Nursery would want to ensure that only those mothers considered most in need of the service were accommodated.

¹³⁶ Sydney Day Nursery Association, *First Annual Report, August 1905 – 1906*, p.13.

As can be seen, although entitled, Regulations for Parents, the regulations were clearly directed towards mothers. And the benefit of Sydney Day Nursery for mothers was a recurring theme throughout the historical sources:

What a comfort it is for the mothers to know that they can leave their little ones where they will be well fed and cared for at the small charge of 3d a day!¹³⁷

Similarly, it was claimed that:

[The nursery] bought so much hope and brightness into the lives of working mothers and little children.¹³⁸

Fathers were rarely mentioned.

The Sydney Day Nursery Association documents, although patronising from a contemporary reading, suggest a real concern with the plight of mothers. For instance, Matron Ryrie stated:

We have a number of mothers who are compelled from various causes to contribute to the domestic up-keep, and with resignation and fortitude they often perform a week's drudgery for a mere pittance.¹³⁹

Kindergarten Union documents too, constructed Free Kindergartens as benefiting poor mothers; the Kindergartener's — "more needy sisters".¹⁴⁰ But the focus of this assistance was not childcare but rather how Free Kindergarten could offer mothers and their children a way out of poverty. As such, it was closely linked to the social justice construct discussed in Chapter Eight:

The heavy lines of hopelessness, misery, bitterness, sorrow or sin could not all be erased, but they were broken by happy smiles; the light of hope shone in their [poor mothers] tired eyes, the great hope of a way out for themselves and their children, and the joy of doing something really worth while; there was that satisfaction, too, in the comradeship that in common cause which we all know, and pride in the thought that in doing

¹³⁷ The Sydney Day Nursery Association, *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*, 3 (4) (1911), p.4.
¹³⁸ H. B. Ryrie, Matron's report, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1908 – 1909*, p.11.
¹³⁹ *ibid*, p.11.
¹⁴⁰ *The Story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds*, p.3.

what they could they were sharing the larger work of the Kindergarten Union.¹⁴¹

Although perhaps condescending, in this statement and the one that follows there is a sense of women uniting together in a spirit of camaraderie around a topic of common interest — mothering:

We count as one of the bye-products of our work the kindly feeling between class and class which it engenders. Rich mother and poor mother, employer's wife and factory hand, meet on the common ground of motherhood, all alike interested in the child and the home, to the benefit of all concerned. If to know all is to forgive all, then such friendly intercourse must be beneficial in these days of industrial strife.¹⁴²

On the other hand, these statements might just reflect a romantic idealism rather than any real collaboration, especially as we cannot know how the working-class mothers interpreted this assistance because no one thought to record their comments or opinions.

Despite the construction of ECEC as benefiting mothers, the following statement by Anderson suggests that their work was interpreted by some in the general public as a threat to the essentialist views of mothers as natural carers, and as possibly interfering with the 'natural' relationship between mother and child.

There is widespread superstition that to take care of a child is to undermine the inborn love of the mother, and to hinder or destroy her maternal responsibility. No pagan superstition has less foundation. The poor uneducated mother who has been, before her marriage, and sometimes even up to the birth of her child, a factory girl or shop hand, has often substantial reason for looking on her baby as a burden, to be got rid of as soon as he can run about.¹⁴³

In the face of this opposition, ECEC had to be constructed in a way that would counter this argument, as Anderson appears to be doing in the following statement:

Of course she loves her offspring, as every creature loves its young, and the more she loves it, the more she feels her ignorance, and the heavier

¹⁴¹ F. E. Newton, Annual report of the Kindergarten Training College, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1905 – 1906*, 7 – 12, p.12.

¹⁴² Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney: Commemoration Address in 1913*, p.15.

¹⁴³ *ibid*, p.4.

grows her burden. To take care of her child for her, not only helps her materially, but also teaches her by example to love it wisely and to treat it better. No working mother ever cared less for her little ones because of the Free Kindergarten. On the contrary, many an ignorant or careless one has there learned her first lesson in homely wisdom.¹⁴⁴

Similarly, when speaking of the role of the Sydney Day Nursery, Dane was careful to point out that those working in the nursery were not trying to interfere with the mother / child relationship:

It is not to relieve these mothers of their responsibility but to ease their overwhelming burden of care and anxiety, to enable them to keep their home and family together.¹⁴⁵

Further, when discussing the operations of Sydney Day Nursery, Matron O'Keefe made explicit mention of the mother child relationship, perhaps to reinforce that the mother / child bond was not broken when children attended childcare:

During the winter evenings, when the gas is lighted, each knock at the door makes the babies look up expectantly and one feels glad that the temporary separation has not lessened the natural love between mother and child.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, Sydney Day Nursery supported and accommodated mothers breast feeding their children during the day. Indeed, the regulations stipulated:

In the case of mothers nursing their infants, arrangements may be made for the mother to attend at convenient intervals for the purpose of feeding her child.¹⁴⁷

Perhaps this was in recognition of the benefit to the infant of breast milk, but perhaps it was also considered a way of ensuring the mother / infant bond.

¹⁴⁴ Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney: Commemoration Address in 1913*, pp.4 – 6.

¹⁴⁵ J. Dane, Sydney Day Nursery Association annual report, *Sydney Day Nursery Association First Annual Report 1905 - 1906*, p.5.

¹⁴⁶ O'Keefe, Matron's Report, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1908 – 1909*, p.29.

¹⁴⁷ Regulations for parents, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report 1908 - 1909*, p.13.

Problematising the Construction of ECEC as Work Done for the Benefit Women

The construction of ECEC as work done for the benefit of women reinforced the construction of childcare as a women's issue. Rather than interpreting the need for ECEC as a legitimate cost of the capitalist economy, the responsibility for childcare was placed on the shoulders of individual mothers. Childcare was seen as an advantage of wealth, or as charity for the poor, rather than a cost that should be borne by all. It remains so today.

There is a tension evident between the two constructs of ECEC that emerged within essentialist ideas. On the one hand, mothers were constructed as the best carers for children and on the other, ECEC was constructed to provide non-maternal care. The construction of ECEC as a service for needy mothers was problematic for non-maternal care. As Cox suggests, this construct upheld the notion that mothers who used childcare were "non-coping parent[s]".¹⁴⁸ As such, non-maternal care, tended to be constructed as unnatural or inferior to mother care. Similarly, Kelly is also highly critical of Sydney Day Nursery Association's exclusionary practices. She argues that restricting the service to only those women without husbands to support them and not providing childcare for those who wanted to work 'merely' to gain financial independence or to supplement their income, served to uphold the patriarchal "bourgeois nuclear family ideal".¹⁴⁹ Certainly the establishment of ECEC did little to challenge the social factors that conspired against women.

¹⁴⁸ Cox, 'Pater-patria', p.196.

¹⁴⁹ J. Kelly 'Not Merely Minded: Care and Education for the Young Child of Working Women in Sydney: The Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association, 1905 – 1945.' PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1988, p.24.

It is also noteworthy that, as I pointed out in Chapter Three, the effect of children's separation from their mothers in non-maternal childcare, especially on the bond between mothers and children, continues to be a focus of much scientific research. It reveals not only how gender discourses continue to shape our beliefs about children's care, but also that the cultural anxiety that non-maternal care invokes may be resistant to change.

Yet, to simply dismiss the work of these early ECEC pioneers as merely holding up bourgeois ideals is disingenuous. Although there is little doubt that the construction of ECEC upheld patriarchal structures and gave middle-class women positions of power over those who were even less powerful — working-class women — there is also ample evidence to suggest that these middle-class women were concerned with the health and welfare of both women and children. Not only did teachers have to operate in ECEC settings with minimal funding which they had to raise themselves, they had many responsibilities beyond teaching. These women were advocates for children and families. They interceded on behalf of poor families, securing milk supplies, negotiating with landlords, and assisted families to set up small business.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, those involved in establishing ECEC also worked towards setting up other services for families and children, such as libraries and playgrounds. So even if they were holding up bourgeoisie ideals, they nevertheless assisted families.

We should also be careful not to suppose the working-class mothers were passive subjects to power. The working-class mothers were actively engaged in the operations of Free Kindergartens. They organised bazaars, dances and entertainments to raise

money for the Kindergarten Union.¹⁵¹ Indeed, if it were not for the mothers' input ECEC could not have existed. Working-class mothers also chose to send their children to ECEC. Indeed, so popular were Free Kindergartens that whenever a new Free Kindergarten opened, enrolments increased rapidly, and many Free Kindergartens and the Sydney Day Nursery had waiting lists.¹⁵² Furthermore, it was said that parents even moved house to be closer to the Kindergartens.¹⁵³ Although this support of ECEC may have been because there were few options available for mothers, it nevertheless seems to suggest that mothers found ECEC to offer some benefits.

The criticisms of both Sydney Day Nursery and Free Kindergartens in constructing ECEC as women's work are valid. But, in order to appreciate the conditions within which the women who established ECEC operated, and how these influenced their practices, it is imperative that we situate the construction of ECEC within the wider discursive environment. It would have been no easy feat for these women to have challenged the norms of the day. As Steedman argues, women needed to make a place for themselves within the social, cultural and biological understandings of 'woman' that existed at that time.¹⁵⁴ They had to conform to these ideas of womanhood in order to be taken seriously. To not do so would have been to threaten male supremacy, and as it was men who had the power, women might have risked losing any small advances they may have made in terms of gaining greater involvement in public life.

¹⁵⁰ R. Harrison, *Sydney Kindergarten Teachers College 1897 – 1981* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers Kindergarten College Graduates Association, 1985).

¹⁵¹ *Kindergarten Union of New South Wales Annual Reports 1904 - 1905, 1906 - 1907, 1911 - 1912, 1912 - 1913.*

¹⁵² M. McKern, 'The history of Woolloomooloo Kindergarten', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 1 (2) (1910), 8.

¹⁵³ *Kindergarten Union of New South Wales Annual Report, 1898 - 1899.*

¹⁵⁴ Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain.*

Rather than try to challenge the construct of 'woman' as essentially different, a perhaps futile path, the women who established ECEC instead created new constructs of ECEC out of essentialist discourses in ways in which women's 'special' and unique feminine qualities could be used to reform society.¹⁵⁵ I do not presume to know the motives of the women who established ECEC, but from my reading I sense their desire and strong commitment to do 'something useful', not only for the children of NSW but also to alleviate the burden on these children's mothers.

Conclusion to Chapter Ten

In this chapter I argued that multiple constructs of ECEC as 'women's work' emerged out of essentialist and new woman discourses evident in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These constructs of ECEC enabled women to enter into the public world and become vocal and visible figures. They provided women with employment that was considered acceptable, and attempted to professionalise the work of caring and educating young children. They enabled women to access higher education and valuable childrearing knowledge, and for the first time, offered women safe work-related childcare. But, in so doing, these constructs of ECEC upheld the essentialist views of womanhood.

These constructs continued to uphold the idea that the care and education of young children was women's natural work and therefore perhaps not valuable, an idea further supported by the tendency to construct ECEC as a philanthropic venture. ECEC may have attempted to unite women in the 'common bond of motherhood', but in reality the

¹⁵⁵ The increased focus on woman's essential qualities seems to have been widespread. It was evident in the United States as well as the United Kingdom. Hulbert refers to this increased focus on women as a "cult of womanhood" (Hulbert, 'The century of the child', p.14).

power lay with middle-class women. The establishment of 'correct' ways of mothering and homemaking, may also have contributed to increasing the scrutiny and control of working-class women. What was once the private domain of women now became public and open to scrutiny. But those constructing ECEC had to operate within the dominant discourses of the time. If ECEC had not been constructed within essentialist discourses it may never have been constructed at all.