MAKING VISIBLE

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS’

WAYS OF NEGOTIATING COMPLEXITY

Tamara Cumming

Bachelor of Social Science (Hons), Bachelor of Arts

A thesis submitted to Charles Sturt University
in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Teacher Education, Faculty of Education and
Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education

Charles Sturt University

March 2015
MAKING VISIBLE

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS’

WAYS OF NEGOTIATING COMPLEXITY

Tamara Cumming
Charles Sturt University
March, 2015
**Table of Contents**

Certificate of authorship ........................................................................................................i

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. iii

List of figures and image use permissions ............................................................................ v

Ethical Approval .................................................................................................................. vii

Abstract ................................................................................................................................ ix

List of publications and presentations arising from doctoral research ................................. xi

Statements of contribution of authorship ............................................................................ xiii

List of abbreviations ............................................................................................................ xix

Glossary of terms .................................................................................................................. xx

List of tables ........................................................................................................................ xxv

List of figures ......................................................................................................................... xxv

List of appendices ................................................................................................................ xxvi

Part One: ............................................................................................................................... 1

Introduction to the thesis ....................................................................................................... 3

  Conceptualising complexity ............................................................................................... 4

Overview of the research project, methodological approaches and analytic strategies ...... 5

Structure of the thesis ............................................................................................................ 6

  Thesis outline .................................................................................................................... 6

Article One ........................................................................................................................... 11

Part Two: ............................................................................................................................. 29

Article Two .......................................................................................................................... 31

Postscript to Article 2 .......................................................................................................... 51

Part Three: ........................................................................................................................... 57

Introduction to Part 3: Methodology .................................................................................... 59

  Methodological considerations ......................................................................................... 59

    Rhizomethodology ......................................................................................................... 59

    Data generation considerations ..................................................................................... 60
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and participants</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data generation</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual methods</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual interviews</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic strategies</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhizoanalysis and reading intensively</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading visual data</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjectivities and data analysis</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research ethics</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Three</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postscript to Article 3</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Four:</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Four</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Five</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Six</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postscript to Part 4</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part Five:</strong></td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Closing</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions of the project to existing research literature</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Making visible the complexity of early childhood practice</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Making visible educators’ ways of negotiating complexity</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions of the project to policy discourses</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Educator’s subjectivities</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Approaches to policy making</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pre-service education</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Supporting workforce sustainability ................................................. 152
5. Methodology used in educational research ................................. 153

Caveats ........................................................................................................ 153
1. Onto-epistemology and dissemination conventions of academic writing ...... 153
2. Human and other-than-human elements of assemblages ..................... 154
3. Arts-based enquiry .................................................................................. 155

Future research directions ......................................................................... 155
1. Investigating the shaping of educators’ subjectivities within practice
assemblages ................................................................................................. 156
2. Negotiating inter-professional complexity ............................................. 156
3. Relational assemblages ........................................................................... 156
4. Workplace focus ..................................................................................... 157

Concluding thoughts ................................................................................... 157

Appendices .................................................................................................. 163
Appendix 1. Invitation to participate ......................................................... 165
Appendix 2. Participant details ................................................................. 167
Appendix 3. Focus Group Questions ......................................................... 171
Appendix 4. Notes for participants .......................................................... 173
Appendix 5. Written guide to arts-based phase ....................................... 177
Appendix 6. Lines of enquiry example ...................................................... 179
Appendix 7. Discussion prompts to use with ‘Di’ ..................................... 181
Appendix 8. Documenting moments of affect ........................................... 183
Appendix 9. Information for participants ................................................ 185
Appendix 10. Consent form for participation in interviews and arts-based phases ...... 189
Appendix 11. Consent form for participation in initial focus group discussion phase .. 191
Appendix 12. Consent form for participation in follow-up focus group phase ........ 193
Appendix 13. Pre-publication version of Table 1 ........................................ 195
Certificate of authorship
I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.

Tamara Cumming
25/3/2015
Acknowledgments

Doing a PhD has been my dream for over 20 years. Now that I am nearing the end of my PhD candidature, I realise the extent to which this journey has been far from mine alone. Rather, it has involved many people for whom this was not a dream, but who nevertheless committed to walk with me as I completed mine. I feel very fortunate to have so many of these people in my life and thank all of them deeply and sincerely.

I am indebted to my supervisors – Professor Jennifer Sumsion, and Dr Sandie Wong – for their guidance in this PhD journey. Thank you Jennifer, for persisting in your suggestions that I might find Deleuze and Guattari useful, and Sandie, for remaining steadfast in your refusal to get too close to Deleuze and Guattari’s work. Working together, Jennifer’s ‘insider’ and Sandie’s ‘outsider’ perspectives have been invaluable in helping me to make sense of Deleuze and Guattari, and to put their thinking to work. More than that however, I greatly appreciate the time, patience, encouragement, engagement, care and wisdom you have offered me. A student could not wish for better supervisors.

Thanks to my family – whose willingness to support me has meant everything, and has made everything possible. To my patient and loving David, whose belief in me always shores me up, and to our little boys Felix and Rory, whose love and ways of being fill my bucket every day. Thanks to my Mum, Christine, and my parents-in-law, Stuart and Jan, who have offered support of all kinds – including time-out relief, and invaluable help with the often complex logistics of our working family. Also to my Dad, who was not with me in body, but whose spirit and perseverance have continued to sustain me through this journey.

Thanks to the participants in my research project – Lara, Vanessa, Di, Marilyn, Esther, Kelly, Kerry, Sharlene, Lyn and Monica. Your accounts of negotiating mixed messages (and many other things besides) continue to fill me with admiration. I consider it a great privilege to have encountered such a resilient, thoughtful, insightful, committed and brave group of women – thank you for giving your time and sharing your experiences with me.

Thanks to Dr Joy Goodfellow – you have taught me a great deal about practices of thinking and enquiring before, in and after focus group discussions. Thank you as well Joy, for modelling such expert focus group facilitation, and for assistance and feedback as I took the lead in groups as we moved through the research project.
Thanks to the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education (RIPPLE) at Charles Sturt University, for providing the post-graduate scholarship that enabled me to undertake the greater part of my PhD studies full-time. Thanks as well to the Excellence in Research in Early Years Education Collaborative Research Network, through which I was able to attend events that were both enriching and pivotal to my PhD work.

I would also like to thank all the anonymous peer reviewers of my articles. Their often extensive and always thoughtful feedback has been much appreciated. Similarly, I thank the editors of the journals to which I submitted my papers. Their guidance and willingness to support my development as a writer has also been very helpful.

To my PhD peers and friends who - through their friendship and support, and by asking the right questions at the right time - helped me to “just keep swimming”. Thanks especially to Tina Stratigos, Andi Salamon, Helen Logan, Linda Knight, Megan Gibson and Lyn Zollo. To my wonderful colleagues at CSU’s Sydney Olympic Park base – Mary Anne Kennan, Peter Reeves, Kate Crowe and Sarah Masso. Thank you for your patience, friendship and support as I’ve journeyed through the past few years. Particular thanks as well to Kate for assistance with formatting my thesis.

To my group - thank you for listening, thank you for helping me manage, and thank you for helping me to find more of myself. Lastly, to my friends actual and virtual, thanks for your interest, and thanks for keeping me smiling and reminding me of the many joys of life beyond PhD.

Tamara Cumming
March 2015
**List of figures and image use permissions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article, figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article 1, figure 1</td>
<td>Australia’s early childhood reform agenda (Created by Tamara Cumming)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 2, figure 1</td>
<td>Strategy cartography (Photograph by Tamara Cumming)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 4, figure 1</td>
<td>Marilyn’s artwork (Used with permission of participant)</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 5, figure 1</td>
<td>Picking flowers (Used with permission of participant Vanessa)</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 6, figures 1, 2 and 3</td>
<td>Lara’s collage Images, clockwise from top left of collage: - circle of figures ©Petrol/www.fotosearch.com - graduation photo used with permission of Lara - calculator image used with permission of ©9GAG - dunce cap image created by Tamara Cumming* - iPad tiny image ©Blendtv</td>
<td>134-136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NB Original dunce cap image was unavailable for reuse for copyright reasons. Image has been recreated for purposes of publication.*
Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for the research contained in this doctorate was obtained from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee (2011/001).
Abstract
This thesis is about ways that early childhood educators in the Australian context negotiate complexity in early childhood practice. In Australia, workforce challenges such as staff shortages, retention and pay inequity appear intractable. The implementation of extensive curricular, quality standards and workforce reforms is underway, and early childhood educators play a central role in achieving desired policy goals as part of these reforms. However, current policy approaches offer few targeted strategies for supporting and sustaining the early childhood workforce in the long term. It is crucial, therefore, to seek additional possibilities for addressing this important issue. This thesis explores the complexity of early childhood practice as a source of support and sustainability.

The complexity of early childhood practice has been acknowledged in policy documents and research literature for some time. However, there has been little explicit empirical attention to the nature of this complexity and educators’ experiences of it. Hints of connections between complexity in early childhood practice and seemingly entrenched early childhood workforce challenges are evident in some studies, while others use post-structural research strategies to explore complex issues in early childhood pedagogy. This thesis connects these lines and methods of enquiry and argues that making visible some of the ways educators negotiate complexity may be a way of helping to generate new possibilities for supporting and sustaining the workforce.

To investigate these possibilities, the research study addresses the question: how do early childhood educators negotiate complexity in early childhood practice? To this end, two groups of early childhood educators (a total of 10 participants) took part in focus group discussions, arts-based enquiry, and individual research conversations. Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, rhizoanalytic strategies were used to read focus group and interview transcripts, visual and affective data, and existing research literature and Australian early childhood policy documents. The readings made visible elements of complexity that were both anticipated (such as discourses and subjectivities), and unanticipated (such as bodily logics, and the productive potential of the imperceptible in early childhood practice). It was also evident that workplace and policy contexts were inextricable parts of the complexity of early childhood practice, and were interrelated with educators and practice in mutually affecting ways.

These interrelations of educators, policy and practice are conceptualised in the thesis as assemblages, which Deleuze and Guattari describe as combinations of elements, such as
people, places, sensations, discourses and materials, that come together to perform particular functions. Using these ideas to focus on how elements combine, and what they produce, has enabled new ways of thinking about the politics of being an educator, and opportunities for preparing and supporting educators in ways that acknowledge the complexity of early childhood practice. Making visible some of the ways educators negotiate complexity has also suggested possibilities for policy approaches that acknowledge ‘less tangible’, but nonetheless productive aspects of early childhood practice. At the same time however, the readings indicate the necessity of both systemic and localised responses in order to generate effective approaches for supporting and sustaining the early childhood workforce.
List of publications and presentations arising from doctoral research

Publications

Article 1.

Article 2.

Article 3.

Article 4.

Article 5.

Article 6.
Presentations


Statements of contribution of authorship

Authorship contribution - Article 1

As co-authors of the article entitled: Rethinking early childhood workforce sustainability in the context of Australia’s early childhood education and care reforms, we confirm that Tamara Cumming has made the following contributions:

- Conceptualisation of the paper
- Review and interpretation of the policy documents and research literature
- Analysis of data for review
- Writing, editing and revision of the manuscript

Furthermore, we agree to the inclusion of the paper in this doctoral research submitted for examination.

Tamara Cumming 25/03/2015

Jennifer Sumsion 25/03/2015

Sandie Wong 25/03/2015
Authorship contribution - Article 2

As co-authors of the article entitled: *Reading between the lines: An interpretative meta-analysis of ways early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing practice*, we confirm that Tamara Cumming has made the following contributions:

- Conceptualisation of the paper
- Review and interpretation of the literature
- Analysis of data for review
- Writing, editing and revision of the manuscript

Furthermore, we agree to the inclusion of the paper in this doctoral research submitted for examination.

**Tamara Cumming**

25/03/2015

**Jennifer Sumson**

25/03/2015

**Sandie Wong**

25/03/2015
Authorship contribution - Article 3

As author of the article entitled: Challenges of 'thinking differently' with rhizoanalytic approaches: A reflexive account I confirm that I made the following contributions:

- Conceptualisation of the paper
- Analysis of data for review
- Writing, editing and revision of the manuscript

Furthermore, I agree to the inclusion of the paper in this doctoral research submitted for examination.

Tamara Cumming 25/03/2015
Authorship contribution - Article 4

As co-authors of the article entitled: *Early childhood practice and refrains of complexity*, we confirm that Tamara Cumming has made the following contributions:

- Conceptualisation of the paper
- Analysis and interpretation of the data generated through the research project
- Writing, editing and revision of the manuscript

Furthermore, we agree to the inclusion of the paper in this doctoral research submitted for examination.

Tamara Cumming 25/03/2015

Jennifer Sumson 25/03/2015

Sandie Wong 25/03/2015
Authorship contribution - Article 5

As co-author of the article entitled: *A politics of imperceptibilities, possibilities and early childhood practice*, I confirm that Tamara Cumming has made the following contributions:

- Conceptualisation of the paper
- Analysis and interpretation of the data generated through the research project
- Writing, editing and revision of the manuscript

Furthermore, I agree to the inclusion of the paper in this doctoral research submitted for examination.

Tamara Cumming  
25/03/2015

Jennifer Sumson  
25/03/2015
Authorship contribution - Article 6

As author of the article entitled: Early childhood educators' experiences in their work environments: Shaping (im)possible ways of being an educator?
I confirm that I made the following contributions:

- Conceptualisation of the paper
- Analysis of data for review
- Writing, editing and revision of the manuscript

Furthermore, I agree to the inclusion of the paper in this doctoral research submitted for examination.

Tamara Cumming 25/03/2015
# List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACECQA</td>
<td>Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Early childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECEC</td>
<td>Early childhood education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECEs</td>
<td>Early childhood educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECDW</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development Workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EYLF</td>
<td>Early Years Learning Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EYWS</td>
<td>Early Years Workforce Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IofM and NRC</td>
<td>Institute of Medicine and National Research Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCAC</td>
<td>National Childcare Accreditation Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCSEEC</td>
<td>Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational education and training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of terms
This is a glossary of ways that terms are understood in this thesis.

Affect
A Deleuzo-Guattarian way of thinking about affect is as the potential of a body (human or other-than-human) to change the capacity of other bodies to act. An example of affect in research data could be a participant reporting ways that others’ behaviour, or choices make a range of other things more or less possible. A Deleuzian concept of affect is the space between “feeling experienced by the embodied human subject...and changes to what [the human] can do” (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 79).

Assemblage
Combinations of people, places, sensations, discourses, materials and so on that stabilise, de- and re-stabilise and perform particular functions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The collective capacity of an assemblage exceeds what any one part could achieve alone. This thesis deals with assemblages of policy, educators, workplaces, discourses, as well as assemblages with particular functions – such as research assemblages (see Part 3) and practice assemblages (see Part 4).

Attrition
Attrition occurs when educators leave work in the early childhood education sector altogether (Sumsion, 2003).

Being
Being is a momentary expression or stabilisation of otherwise shifting and relational processes of becoming (Lenz Taguchi, 2011). Nothing ever is alone, only in relation to other things (Mol, 2002).

Becoming
Processes of becoming are always in motion, however, not moving towards a particular or predetermined point. Becoming is always on the threshold of something, or somewhere else (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013).

Complexity
Complexity gestures to: the many elements that constitute or shape early childhood practice (seen as an ‘open system’), and, the interrelated processes of these elements combining in assemblages through which early childhood practice ‘works’, and through which ways of being an educator are shaped.
**Difference**
Difference is understood in this thesis as “the particularity or ‘singularity’ of each individual thing, moment, perception or conception”— or a “difference in itself” (Stagoll, 2010, p. 74).

**Discourse**
Discourses are codified, sometimes dominant ways of thinking and speaking about things (Foucault, 1980). Discourses can have productive, as well as repressive potential.

**In-home care**
A carer providing care to a child in that child’s home, most often when the child (or others in the home) have a disability, or another family member has a disability reducing their capacity to care for the child. May also be available to children living in rural or remote areas, or when no other services are available during the work hours of a child’s primary carer (Productivity Commission, 2014).

**Less tangible**
In this thesis, ‘less tangible’ (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2005) aspects of early childhood practice are those relational, affective, sometimes ‘hidden’ (Goodfellow, 2003) aspects that are difficult to observe and measure, yet that also seem to play an important role in how early childhood practice works.

**Long day care**
Centre-based children’s services providing full or part-day services for children aged birth to five years (Productivity Commission, 2014).

**Micro- and macro-politics**
Micro and macro-politics are conceptualised as types of forces that act to regularise or stabilise (macro-politics) or to disrupt or reorganise (micro-politics) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

**Mobile children’s services**
“Mobile Children’s Services provide flexible, responsive and innovative services to children and families experiencing social, geographic, cultural or economic isolation or a combination of these.” (Mobile Children’s Services Association, 2014). These services often take the form of playgroups that are operated in community facilities.
Multi-purpose services
Children’s services that include co-located long day care, preschool, family support or other allied health professional services (Productivity Commission, 2014).

Post-structural
As a philosophy, post-structuralism is concerned with non-representational thought. That is, “it does not respect the artificial division between the three domains of representation[: subject, concept and being” (Massumi, 1987, p. xii), seeing these instead as entwined and mutually productive with the “fabrication of realities” (MacLure, 2013, p. 167).

Preschool
Centre-based services delivering programs for children aged four or five (in Australia, the year before children generally begin school) (Productivity Commission, 2014).

Reading intensively
Reading intensively is a tactic of rhizoanalysis (Honan, 2004). Reading intensively involves reading for affect - moments of intensity in which seems to be a shift in the capacity of a body (human or other-than-human) to act (see Articles 3 and 6). Readings can be made of ways that elements of assemblages combine and produce change. These elements might include the textual, material, less tangible, human and other-than-human.

Rhizome
In the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) a rhizome is a figure characterised by multiple, proliferating connections between diverse modes such as the ‘…linguistic …perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 8). The rhizome has no predetermined structure, and can be entered at any point. Accordingly, rhizomatic thinking challenges causal or linear views of relationships between acts or ideas that are often represented and stabilised through arborescent logic (tree-like, hierarchical models).

Rhizoanalysis
Rhizoanalysis involves experimenting with connections between things, exploring how they work, and what is produced through connections (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The purpose of a rhizoanalysis then, is not to categorise, or to develop a generalizable theory. Rather, a rhizoanalysis enables a way of thinking differently “…that might produce previously unthought questions, practices, and knowledge” (Mazzei & McCoy, 2010, p. 504).
Subjectivities
Subjectivities are “provisional, contingent [and] constructed...” ways of being (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p. 23).

Turnover
Turnover occurs as educators leave one workplace for another (Sumson, 2003).

References


List of tables

Table 1. Studies reviewed for interpretative meta-analysis  Pages 35-36
Table 2. Additional studies published since 2012  Page 53
Table 3. Data generated through the research project  Page 64

List of figures

Article 1, figure 1. Australia’s early childhood reform agenda  Page 14
Article 2, figure 1. Strategy cartography  Page 38
Article 4, figure 1. Marilyn’s artwork  Page 104
Article 5, figure 1. Picking flowers  Page 119
Article 6, figure 1. Lara’s visual collage  Page 134
Article 6, figure 2. Unexpected effects  Page 135
Article 6, figure 3. (Im)possible ways of being an educators?  Page 136
List of appendices

Appendix 1. Invitation to participate  page 165
Appendix 2. Participant details  page 167
Appendix 3. Focus group questions  page 171
Appendix 4. Notes for participants  page 173
Appendix 5. Written guide to arts-based phase  page 177
Appendix 6. Lines of enquiry example  page 179
Appendix 7. Discussion prompts to use with ‘Di’  page 181
Appendix 8. Documenting moments of affect  page 183
Appendix 9. Information for participants  page 185
Appendix 10. Consent form for participation in interviews and arts-based phases  page 189
Appendix 11. Consent form for participation in initial focus group discussion phase  page 191
Appendix 12. Consent form for participation in follow-up focus group discussion phase  page 193
Appendix 13. Pre-publication version of Table 1.  page 195
Part One:

Introduction to the thesis
and the Australian early childhood education
policy context
Introduction to the thesis

The provision of universally accessible, high quality early childhood education has, for many years, been recognised as supporting good outcomes for children, for families, and for economic productivity (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2012). One of the elements that contributes to high quality early childhood education is a stable early childhood workforce (International Labour Organization, 2014). However, finding ways to effectively support and sustain the early childhood workforce – especially through large-scale policy initiatives – has been elusive across many national contexts, including Australia. How then, might new possibilities be generated?

One way of generating new possibilities arises from the increasingly familiar refrain of ‘the complexity of early childhood educators’ practice’ in policy documents, and much of the research literature. This refrain reinforces the idea that early childhood practice is indeed complex; yet has there been little elaboration or exploration of the nature or experiences of complexity in educators’ practice. This thesis aims to make visible the complexity of early childhood practice, and educators’ experiences of complexity, as a means of generating new possibilities for supporting and sustaining the workforce. It does so by reporting on a study guided by the research question: How do early childhood educators in Australia negotiate complexity in early childhood practice?

This research question is also informed by my ongoing interest in the professional practice of educators. Working as an ‘untrained’ educator first exposed me to the many pressures and frequently competing messages that shape educators’ practice. This interest was later extended through my undergraduate degree in sociology that culminated in a research project and thesis in 2006. That project investigated ways that discourses of empowerment circulated amongst a group of educators working in an early intervention and inclusion agency. At the conclusion of that project, questions remained, such as: How might the

---

1 The concept of ‘quality’ is highly contested in early childhood education (Urban,Vandenbroeck, Van Laere, Lazzari & Peeters, 2012). Logan and Sumson (2010) classify these debates around their underpinning modernist or post-modernist perspectives. Accordingly, they suggest that modernist conceptions of quality seek to establish definable, measurable factors of quality – as in Clifford, Harms and Cryer’s (1998) influential Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale. By contrast, post-modern perspectives on quality in early childhood education advocate for recognition of the deeply subjective and contextual nature of quality, and the validity of multiple views of what quality is, and how it might be evaluated (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). In Australia, the National Quality Framework (Australian Children’s Services Education & Care Authority, 2012) is based on two key documents. Firstly, the National Quality System, which establishes seven key areas across which the quality of early childhood services is judged. The second key document is the Early Years Learning Framework (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009). This document provides practice guidelines acknowledging the contextuality of quality, and the important role of educators’ practices. In this way, quality in the Australian context draws on modernist and post-modernist perspectives of quality.
discourses circulating in educators’ work environments affect their sense of self? How might educators sustain their agency in the face of multiple challenges? These questions remained with me, as I continued my work as a research officer in a children’s services organisation.

In 2009, *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* [EYLF] (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009) was released. This framework constituted Australia’s first national early childhood education curriculum guidelines. I was struck by – what seemed to me – a dizzying and complex array of suggestions for ways educators could promote children’s learning. I wondered how educators might manage to bring together combinations of all the actions, styles, dispositions, theories and knowledges that the EYLF mentioned. As I thought further along those lines, I began to be interested in how educators negotiated the discourses and sometimes mixed messages, produced by documents such as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009). Drawing on my earlier research project, I also wondered how educators might negotiate elements of complexity in their work environments.

Initially, I took as the basis for my investigation the growing body of literature concerned with ways discourses and subjectivities might inform educators’ practice. I approached this literature with a Foucauldian-derived interest in how educators were reported to have negotiated relations of power circulating through discourses. This methodology appeared to me inadequate, however, for making sense of the complexity that seemed evident in educators’ accounts of their practice. Other possibilities were evident in the rhizoanalytic methodological approaches used, for example, by Olsson (2009) and Honan (2004). Accordingly, I turned to the work of Deleuze and Guattari for its potential for making sense of ways complex combinations of elements come together to produce change. In particular, Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of assemblages, macro- and micro-politics and rhizoanalysis opened new possibilities for enquiry that is oriented to making visible complexity at work in educators’ practice.

**Conceptualising complexity**

The conceptualisations of complexity in this thesis are therefore underpinned by three main ideas: Firstly, ideas of complexity as complicated, involved, intricate or composite (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2012); secondly, that complexity involves elements that are “entwined [or] twisted together” (Heylighen, 1996, n.p.) – that is, interrelated and mutually affecting; and thirdly, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) ideas of complex systems (such as social
systems). According to Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking, complex systems are constituted by flows (or forces) that may stabilise (macro-politics), de-stabilise (micro-politics) or take things in new directions entirely (lines of flight) (Bonta & Protevi, 2004). By extension then, complexity in early childhood practice is conceptualised in this thesis as an interrelatedness of multiple elements – both human and other-than-human – that move in stabilising, de-stabilising, or altogether new ways.

**Overview of the research project, methodological approaches and analytic strategies**

This research project has been designed in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) key concerns with how things work, and what they produce. Therefore, rather than only identifying or defining complexity in early childhood practice, the study focuses on how educators negotiate complexity. The project is informed by a rhizomatic methodology that draws on ideas from Deleuze and Guattari, and upon research approaches described by Honan (2004), Olsson (2009) and Pacini Ketchabaw (2013).

Ten educators participated in the study which involved four phases of data generation: an initial focus group discussion (two groups, each with five participants); individual participant generation of visual materials; individual interviews and a follow-up focus group discussion (with each of the two groups). Data generated included recordings of focus group discussions and individual interviews, transcripts of these discussions and interviews, photo collages and artwork, and affective data (such as gestures, tones of voice, or silence). These data were analysed using strategies of reading intensively (Masny, 2012), plugging in (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) and mapping (Ringrose & Coleman, 2013).

My readings of the data, along with those generated by participants through the phases of the research project, enabled exploration and elaboration of refrains of the complexity of early childhood educators’ practice. These readings made visible elements of complexity, multiple ways that educators negotiated complexity, the productive potential of less tangible aspects of early childhood practice, and ways that workplace and policy contexts were inextricable parts of the complexity of early childhood practice. On the bases of these insights, I argue for reconceptualisations of the ways educators’ subjectivities are shaped, and expanded approaches to policy making and pre-service education that acknowledge the nature and experiences of complexity in educators’ practice. These then, are ways that findings from the research project might contribute to efforts to better support and sustain the early childhood workforce.
Structure of the thesis

The thesis is presented as a series of six articles. All of the articles report on the research study, and have been published in peer-reviewed journals (please see the contribution to authorship forms on pages xii-xvii for details of my leadership of and contribution to each article). For this reason, referencing styles differ due to the need to conform to each journal’s preferred style. In addition, the need to include some context for each article has resulted in some repetition of details such as those of the research project, methodological approaches and analytic strategies.

An exegesis articulates the six articles into a coherent thesis. It does so by, for example, orienting an article in relation to the research question, or updating literature published since the articles were published. An outline of the five parts of the thesis and the location of each article follows.

Thesis outline

Part 1 comprises this Introduction, along with Article 1. Article 1 – ‘Rethinking early childhood workforce sustainability in the context of Australia’s early childhood education and care reforms’ (International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, 9(2) published online 11 March, 2015) – is a policy analysis. It describes the international and Australian early childhood workforce policy and research contexts that frame the thesis. In addition, it establishes two possibilities for developing other possibilities for supporting and sustaining the early childhood workforce – rethinking discourses of sustainability, and using innovative methodologies in research practices concerned with the early childhood workforce.

Part 2 comprises Article 2, and a postscript. Article 2 – ‘Reading between the lines: An interpretative meta-analysis of ways early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing practice’ (published in Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 14(3), pp. 223-240) reviews research literature concerned with ‘less tangible’ aspects of early childhood practice in research literature. Findings from the analysis make visible a highly complex set of strategies that educators have used to negotiate relations of power in their work. The findings also identify limitations of existing methodological approaches to research concerned with educators’ practice. These limitations suggest the productive potential of turning to other approaches for exploring complexity in educators’ practice. In the postscript I discuss the rationale for my shift from a primarily Foucauldian orientation
to the research question, to one based on the work of Deleuze and Guattari. I also update the literature reviewed in Article 2, and draw on that more recent literature to extend the analysis.

**Part 3** comprises a detailed introduction to the methodology, approaches and ethics of the research study, along with Article 3, and a postscript. Article 3 – ‘Challenges of ‘thinking differently’ with rhizoanalytic approaches: A reflexive account’ (published in *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 38(2), pp. 137-148) – describes how I operationalised Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of rhizome to explore complexity in educators’ practice, and the challenges this posed to my research practices. In the postscript, I expand upon ways the worthiness of rhizoanalytic strategies can be judged, given that standards of research ‘quality’ such as transferability, credibility or dependability have little application to research practices aiming to consider how things work, and what these produce (Lather, 1993).

**Part 4** comprises Articles 4, 5 and 6, and a postscript. The three articles in Part 4 present readings of the data generated through the research study. Article 4 – ‘Exploring refrains of the complexity of early childhood practice’ (published in *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, 35(1), pp. 80-95) – presents readings of data illustrating complexity at work in educators’ practice, and the subjectivities produced through ways of negotiating complexity. It also presents readings of data illustrating how complex interrelations of elements produce change. Article 5 is titled: ‘Politics of imperceptibilities, possibilities and early childhood practice’ (published in *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 15(4), pp. 368-377). This article focuses on one aspect of the complexity of early childhood practice – those that are hidden or ‘less tangible’ – and identifies some of the ways that these aspects of early childhood practice work. Article 6 – ‘Early childhood educators’ experiences in their work environments: Shaping (im)possible ways of being an educator?’ (published in *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity*, 12(1), pp. 52-66, special issue on early childhood education) draws on additional data from the research study, focusing on one educator’s experiences in her work environment. This data is read through research literature relating to workforce challenges, and Australian policy documents. The readings of (im)possible ways of being an educator shaped by the work environment are then used as prompts for thinking differently about workforce stability and sustainability. In the postscript to the three articles, I synthesise their findings and contribution in relation to the overall concerns of the thesis.
In Part 5 – A Closing – I synthesise the arguments presented in the thesis, and highlight contributions of the study to the research literature. I also suggest implications for three areas warranting further consideration: educators’ subjectivities, workforce sustainability, and the use of rhizomatic methodologies in educational research. In addition I suggest a number of possible future research directions. These possibilities concern: the development of educators’ capacities for negotiating complexity in early childhood practice; the reconceptualising of relationships between educators and children; and, the production and negotiation of tensions in early childhood workplaces. In concluding, I argue for the need for ongoing attention to and action regarding the complexity of early childhood practice.

References


Article One

Rethinking early childhood workforce sustainability in the context of Australia's early childhood education and care reforms

Tamara Cumming1,2*, Jennifer Sumson1 and Sandie Wong1,2

Abstract

Early childhood workforce sustainability is an important issue, with implications for children, families and national productivity, as well as for educators themselves. Yet, in many national contexts, workforce challenges continue to undermine efforts to support sustainability. In this article, we evaluate efforts to address early childhood workforce challenges in the Australian context, where extensive early childhood reforms are underway. We argue that attempts to address workforce challenges in current policy initiatives are limited and may be insufficient for sustaining the early childhood workforce in the long term. Given the critical role that the early childhood workforce plays in Australia’s early childhood reform agenda, we then consider how workforce sustainability could be rethought and other possibilities generated for addressing entrenched workforce challenges. We conclude by arguing that greater attention to the everyday politics of educators’ practice, along with the forces shaping these milieux, may be a way of generating new possibilities for supporting workforce sustainability.

Keywords: Early childhood education; Early childhood educators; Early childhood teachers; Post structural theory; Australia

Background

Early childhood educators [referred to hereafter as ‘educators’], and the workforce they comprise, are critical to ‘universally accessible, high-quality ECE provision’ (International Labour Organization 2014, 6) that best supports good outcomes for children, families and economic productivity (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD] 2006; Gable et al. 2007). Yet, across many national contexts, challenges in attracting and retaining educators for many parts of the prior-to-school sector (all education and care that occurs before formal schooling begins) make it difficult to sustain the workforce over time. An extensive body of research concerned with workforce challenges has consistently suggested that to be effective, policy efforts need to address multiple challenges at setting, community and policy levels (as reviewed by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council [IoM and NRC] 2012). However, as we discuss below, rather than taking a comprehensive approach, many policy initiatives tend to address only some aspects of workforce sustainability.
In Australia for example, efforts are being made to address workforce challenges as part of the extensive early childhood reform agenda that is currently being implemented. An illustration of the parts of the reform agenda specifically concerned with the workforce appears in Figure 1 (below). As this figure shows, the Early Years Workforce Strategy (Standing Committee on School Education and Early Childhood [SCSEEC] 2012) is a key part of the broader approach to early childhood sector reform. The workforce strategy frames a range of initiatives, providing funding support for educators to gain or improve their qualifications, and (to a lesser extent) support ongoing professional development and recognition. Workforce sustainability is a central tenet of the workforce strategy - as evident in its aim to: 'deliver a sustainable, highly qualified and professional workforce' (SCSEEC 2012, 3). The qualifications and professionalism foci of the workforce strategy (and its initiatives) are likely to go some way to addressing the identified skills and staff shortages in early childhood education roles in Australia (Bretherton 2010). However, given what is known about effective approaches to workforce sustainability (also detailed further below), we argue that the approaches offered by the Australian Workforce Strategy and initiatives are limited and may prove insufficient to sustain the early childhood workforce in the long term.

Nevertheless, developing a capable and effective early childhood workforce is still critical to achieving the goals of the early childhood reform agenda (Council of Australian Governments [COAG] 2009a). Accordingly, to open other possibilities for addressing entrenched workforce challenges and supporting workforce sustainability, our purpose in this article is twofold. Our first purpose is to speculate about the likely effectiveness of Australia's early childhood workforce strategies; our second is to think differently about concepts of sustainability and the politics of educators' practice and consider how these might assist in generating other possibilities.

We begin our discussion with a brief review of international literature concerned with commonly documented challenges relating to the early childhood workforce, in order to highlight the scope and complexity of these challenges. Next come details of some of the context and content of Australia's early childhood reforms, with a

Figure 1 Australia's early childhood reform agenda.
focus on parts of the reforms relating to the early childhood education workforce. We then profile Australia’s early childhood workforce, including some of the key workforce challenges faced in the Australian context. This is followed by a critical reading of the Early Years Workforce Strategy (SCSEEC 2012), informed by research literature concerned with connections between workforce qualifications, retention and professionalism. In particular, we highlight what we see as some potential limitations of the workforce strategy for the long-term sustainability of the early childhood workforce.

In the final section of the article, we offer ways of thinking differently about sustainability. In particular, we consider how a process-oriented conceptualisation of sustainability (rather than one assuming sustainability can be ‘delivered’) (SCSEEC 2012, 3) might inform efforts to address entrenched workforce challenges. We also draw upon Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) ideas about flows of micro- and macro-politics to suggest the potential of micro-politics of educators’ practice as a means of thinking further about the macro-politics of workforce sustainability. We conclude by offering suggestions for research attending to ‘less tangible’ aspects of educators’ practice, and the politics of their negotiation, as a way of continuing to think differently about workforce sustainability and perhaps to generate new possibilities for supporting it.

**Early childhood workforce challenges**

Among the most commonly documented challenges relating to the early childhood workforce are: incommensurate pay (United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF] 2008), lack of professional status (IoM and NRC 2012), workplace stress (Whitebook and Ryan 2011) and limited career development opportunities (Productivity Commission 2011). These factors appear to consistently work in combination to ‘...influence who enters and stays in the workforce, as well as the quality and effectiveness of their services for children and families’ (IoM and NRC 2012, 61). High levels of turnover (between workplaces) and attrition (from the field altogether) have widespread implications (Whitebook and Ryan 2011) for educators, families and the broader economy. For example, an undersupply of educators (due to challenges such as attrition) can jeopardise the availability and affordability of good quality early childhood education and care that is crucial to many parents’ workforce participation (UNICEF 2008; Bretherton 2010).

At the same time, staff turnover and attrition have perhaps the most far-reaching and potentially long-lasting consequences for educators and children. In particular, turnover and attrition can be detrimental to educators, families and children developing and maintaining the relationships that best support children’s learning and development experiences (OECD 2006; Gable et al. 2007). Additionally, in settings with high staff turnover, the quality of professional practice and professional culture can be undermined by recurrent change and/or the loss of pedagogical leadership (Whitebook and Ryan 2011; IoM and NRC 2012). Turnover can also contribute to levels of stress (Groeneveld et al. 2012) and depression among educators who remain in a setting with high rates of turnover (de Schipper et al. 2008). Experiences such as these may potentially undermine educators’ capacity for high quality practice, as well as for their personal well-being (Whitebook and Ryan 2011).

However, sustaining educators in the sector may not always be desirable - for example, if their motivation for remaining in the field is only due to a lack of other work
opportunities (IoSM and NRC 2012) or they are not fully committed and engaged with children and families (Bretherton 2010). Efforts to better support and sustain educators and the workforce therefore need to be premised on attracting and retaining adequate numbers of appropriately qualified and capable educators.

As this brief overview of workforce challenges suggests, there is much at stake in the development of effective strategies for supporting workforce sustainability. Yet, evidence from many national contexts suggests that challenges such as those documented above are entrenched problems (UNICEF 2008). In the Australian context, the complexity of addressing these challenges to workforce sustainability is magnified by factors such as: a legacy of a bifurcated education/care system; multiple government funding pathways; and diverse service ownership structures and regulatory jurisdictions associated with Australia's federated political system (Productivity Commission 2011). Despite this complex context, the Australian Government and state and territory governments, under the auspice of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), have begun integrating a highly fragmented sector and have begun to address workforce challenges. The next part of the article gives an outline of the reform agenda, then, profiles Australia's early childhood workforce and some of the existing challenges to its sustainability.

**Australia's early childhood education reform agenda**

Since 2007, the implementation of an extensive early childhood reform agenda (COAG 2009a) has been underway in Australia. These reforms were prompted (in part) by Australia's relatively poor performance against 2006 OECD indicators of investment in early childhood education; by compelling evidence of the importance of early childhood education in supporting positive outcomes for children and a highly fragmented system of service provision and regulation (Logan, Sumison and Press: The shaping of quality in Australian early childhood education and care what can we learn from the critical juncture? forthcoming). Although these challenges had been reported for at least a decade, the reform agenda was finally made possible by a renewed commitment to social investment that accompanied the change from a conservative to a more progressive federal government in 2007 (Brennan 2011).

The early childhood reform agenda '...covers children from before birth to eight years and aims to improve the health, safety, early learning and wellbeing of all children and better support disadvantaged children to reduce inequalities' (COAG 2009a, 4). In order to fund this agenda, Australia's federal government and its state and territory governments increased their investment in early childhood education by over 53% between 2007-08 and 2011-12 (Productivity Commission 2013). Figure 1 illustrates some of the main aspects of the early childhood reform agenda that relate to the arguments about workforce sustainability that are made in this article. Brief details of each aspect are included after the diagram.

- The **National Partnership on Early Childhood Education** (COAG 2008) was established: '...as a starting point for joint [government] action to improve the supply and integration of early childhood services, including child care and early learning and development' (COAG 2008, 3). A key commitment of this
National Partnership is to 'ensure universal access to [15 hours of] quality early childhood education in the year before school' (COAG 2008, 1). This policy is closely connected to workforce sustainability because of the need for greater numbers of appropriately qualified educators to meet the increased demand this policy has generated (see 'Qualifications' box in Figure 1 for further details).

- The National Early Childhood Development Strategy (COAG 2009a, 4) was established with a 'shared vision... that by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation'. This Strategy integrated (and in some cases established) a complex range of early childhood education, health and family services and targeted strategies to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage (Australian Government Department of Education 2014).

- The National Quality Framework (Australian Children's Services Education and Care Quality Authority 2012), the National Quality Standard (COAG 2009b) and quality rating system, and Australia's first national early childhood curriculum guide The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DE 2009) also have implications for workforce sustainability. The National Quality Standard focuses on the importance of qualifications and higher staff to child ratios as 'key influences on the quality of care', while the EYLF provides a guide to assist educators to provide 'quality teaching and learning' (DE 2009, 5).

- The Early Years Workforce Strategy (SCSEEC 2012, 3) aims to: 'deliver a sustainable, highly qualified and professional workforce' by focusing on a range of measures for improving educators' qualifications (and to a lesser extent, professional recognition). As indicated in Figure 1, a number of targeted workforce initiatives are part of this workforce strategy.

**Australia's early childhood workforce**

**Profile**

In 2013, Australia’s early childhood workforce was estimated at 153,155 (Australian Government Department of Education [DE] 2014). It has been growing at around 4% per year for the last 10 years, with especially strong growth in the parts of the workforce employed by long day care (that operate for up to 11 h daily, year round, and may accept children from 0 to 5 years) and preschool (that operate for 3 to 6 h daily, during school terms only, and usually accept children aged 3 to 5 years) services. Well over half of the early childhood workforce is employed in centre-based, approved care services - with 49.4% working in long day care services and 17.6% working in 'preschool' services (DE 2014). A further 22% work in services for school-aged children (provided before or after school or during vacation times); 9% in family day care (educators providing services in their own home, for up to five children); and less than 2% (combined) in occasional care centres and in-home care (usually one on one care of a child in the child's home) (Productivity Commission 2014).

According to the 2013 National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census, over 80% of educators working in approved care services in Australia had an early childhood-related qualification - an increase of over 10% in 3 years since the previous
workforce census. Of those with early childhood-related qualifications: 6% had a (3 or 4 year) bachelor degree (from a university); 28% had a diploma qualification; and 36% a certificate qualification (from a vocational education and training institution) (The Social Research Centre 2014). In response to the higher staff ratios and qualification requirements mandated by the new National Quality Standard (COAG 2009b), demand for both vocationally and university-qualified educators has substantially increased (Productivity Commission 2014, 487) and is expected to remain high.

**Workforce challenges**

Some of the challenges relating to Australia’s early childhood workforce sustainability are consistent with experiences in other national contexts, in particular: pay that is incommensurate with the skill and responsibility required of educators, educators perceiving that there is a lack of public recognition of their professionalism and, that work in other sectors offers the same pay but is perceived to be less stressful (Productivity Commission 2011). Also similarly to other national contexts, rates of staff turnover between workplaces are high in Australia - estimated at between 25% and 37% per year (depending on jurisdiction and job classification) (Community Services Ministers’ Advisory Council 2006). Staff shortages are also widespread and, along with turnover, are especially problematic among diploma and university-qualified educators, in regional and remote areas and in the long day care workforce. In addition, there are difficulties attracting and retaining educators (of all qualifications) for indigenous-focused services (Productivity Commission 2014). A shortage of service leaders also appears to create additional pressure; with educators sometimes promoted beyond their skills, experience and knowledge (Bretherton 2010). As some advocates have suggested, without ongoing mentoring and skills development, these leaders may subsequently ‘burn out’ and leave the sector (United Voice - The Childcare Union 2011).

With these challenges in mind, we now go on to speculate about the effectiveness of Australia’s workforce initiatives for sustaining the early childhood workforce in the longer term. We undertake this task via a critical reading - that is, by questioning and evaluating - the claims of the Early Years Workforce Strategy (SCSEEC 2012) when read through existing research literature. We then consider how other possibilities for addressing workforce challenges could be generated by (better) mobilising discourses of sustainability and ideas about micro- and macro-political flows.

**The early years workforce strategy: a critical reading**

**A highly qualified workforce?**

The stated purpose of the Early Years Workforce Strategy is to: ‘build and support the early childhood education and care profession both in the short term and into the future’ (SCSEEC 2012, 2). However, the Strategy’s focus on increasing numbers of more highly qualified educators, and offering ongoing professional development, addresses only some of the issues known to challenge workforce sustainability. In addition, some problematic connections are made between workforce development strategies and staff retention in the Early Years Workforce Strategy. In particular, the strategy is premised on the idea that ‘training’ the workforce will lead to ‘retaining’ it (DE 2014). Although
qualifications in early childhood education are generally thought to be beneficial (by contributing to 'higher quality learning outcomes' for children (DE 2014, n.p.), qualifications themselves are not necessarily predictive of retention (Torquati et al. 2007; Ryan and Ackerman 2005). Indeed, retention problems can be exacerbated as university-qualified educators can be attracted away from the prior-to-school sector to alternative career options (especially teaching in schools) where pay and conditions are better (Bretherton 2010; Productivity Commission 2014).

It also seems to be the case that some educators entering the early childhood workforce after completing pre-service education can find working conditions in the early childhood sector very different to what they anticipated or early childhood practice far more complex than they expected (Sumison 2003, 2004; Noble and Macfarlane 2005). Disillusionments such as these, along with a lack of capacity to negotiate them, seemed to contribute to turnover or attrition of educators in the studies cited here. These critiques should not be read as arguments against the benefits of higher qualifications for the quality of educators’ practice. Rather, we are arguing that an effective workforce sustainability strategy (in terms of retention) needs to recognise and address the risks inherent in large numbers of educators completing qualifications, then being offered little in return for the effort and expense of having gained these qualifications.

A professional workforce?

Another area of the Early Years Workforce Strategy we wish to explore through our critical reading concerns discourses of professionalism and professionalisation. As governments in many national contexts set ‘ambitious policy goals’ (Urban 2008, 135) for developing early childhood education systems, there has also been increasing focus upon professionalising the early childhood workforce.

Through an emphasis upon measurable, standardised aspects of early childhood practice such as credentialling (Osgood 2010) and qualifications (Urban 2008), policy initiatives can conflate professionalisation with professionalism, thereby shaping discourses of professionalism in limited ways (as Osgood 2006 reports, for example).

The Early Years Workforce Strategy appears to reflect this agenda through its emphasis on the development of educators’ professionalism via the acquisition of ‘specialist skills and knowledge’ and participation in ‘professional development and job-based training opportunities’ (SCSEEC 2012, 8). Similarly, increased professional status for educators is linked to the establishment of measurable ‘professional standards’ (8) and the ‘improved and nationally consistent qualification requirements’ (SCSEEC 2012, 4) of the National Quality Framework. While these are all relevant and important elements of the professionalisation of the workforce, the emphasis upon these elements in the workforce strategy, could also limit possibilities for conceptualising professionalism in early childhood practice. This is problematic insofar as others have noted many other complex ways in which professionalism is inflected in early childhood practice (Urban 2010). For example, an emphasis upon the production and application of expert knowledge (Urban 2008) can obscure the role of ‘hidden dimensions of [early childhood] professional practice’ that are critical to educators making sound judgement[s] in the use of personal/professional, theoretical and practical knowledge’ (Goddlelows 2003, p. 48). Similarly, knowledge-based discourses of professionalism may ignore the important
relational aspects of early childhood practice (Dalli 2008) that are important to educators’ own conceptualisations of their professionalism (Ortlipp et al. 2011).

Linking improvements to professional status only with large-scale reforms can also be problematic. For example, diverse (and sometimes divisive) conceptualisations of and claims to professional status can enable or constrain educators’ sense of professionalism. Brooker (2010), for example, reports on ways that parents’ validation (or invalidation) of educators’ professional status (in two UK settings) had different effects on educators’ sense of professionalism. Similarly, Kim (2004) study with South Korean educators suggested that claims to professionalism were contested between educators themselves, depending on whether they held a university rather than a vocational qualification.

The type of early childhood service in which an educator works can also inflect the professionalism attributed to them. This is often the case in the Australian context, where educators in preschools are sometimes viewed as more professional than those with the same qualifications working in long day care services. This is partly due to persistent misconceptions that preschools are always more focused on education than long day care services whose focus is upon ‘care’ (Cheeseman and Torr 2009). Differences in working conditions between service types can exacerbate status differentials too, with educators working in preschools generally having access to ‘higher salaries, shorter hours and more holidays’ (Productivity Commission 2014, 489) than their identically qualified colleagues working in long day care services.

These examples suggest that professionalism in early childhood practice is far more complex than conveyed by the limited discourses mobilised in the Early Years Workforce Strategy. Moreover, that while a policy focus on large-scale elements of professionalisation are important, so too is attention to the ways workplace cultures and relations with families and colleagues have the capacity to enable or constrain educators’ professional status. For these reasons, we argue that the focus in the Early Years Workforce Strategy upon professionalisation via credentialling, qualifications and professional learning may not be sufficient to improve perceptions or recognition of the complexity of educators’ professionalism.

An appropriately remunerated workforce?

A final issue we wish to explore in our critical reading of the workforce strategy concerns wage equity. In 2011, a research report on the Australian early childhood workforce (Productivity Commission, xxx) emphasised the importance of ‘pay and conditions, both absolute and relative to other occupations’ as a key incentive for workers ‘to gain the appropriate qualifications, to enter the workforce, to upgrade their qualifications where necessary, and to remain in the workforce’. Despite these recommendations, the subsequent workforce strategy stated that: ‘matters such as lower pay and conditions compared to other sectors are recognised as affecting professional status but are outside the scope of the strategy, as they are for employers and employees to negotiate’ (SCSEEC 2012, 4). While issues relating to pay can dominate discussions of workforce sustainability, wages that are commensurate with the skills and responsibility of early childhood practice have been consistently identified as a major part of an effective retention strategy (IoM and NRC 2012; International Labour Organization
2014). By failing to recognise this interrelationship, and the need for government-sponsored (if not funded) measures that support wage equity, the question of 'who pays?' for Australia's 'sustainable, highly qualified and professional workforce' (SCSEEC 2012, 3) continues to be displaced to families and 'the market' to determine (Brennan 2011).

The likelihood of wage equity being successfully addressed through market mechanisms seems remote however, as the costs and wage implications of better-paid educators are often seen as antithetical to the interests of employers and/or families (Woodrow 2007; Lyons 2011). Recent Productivity Commission reports (2011, 2014), for example, have recorded the reluctance of educators to ask for higher wages, and of employers to offer them, because increased costs would be most likely passed on to families in the form of higher fees, potentially leading to the removal of some children from services. Whitebook and Ryan (2011) offer a different perspective on this issue, arguing that wages and benefits 'that support adult well-being' are important features of the adult work environment that in turn, impacts educators' 'ability to apply their knowledge and skills effectively (6). Seen in this way, educators' rights to fair pay, and children's and families' interests, need not be seen as mutually exclusive. It could also be argued that if calls for improved public recognition of professional status are not matched by improved remuneration, the undervaluation of educators' practice might be perpetuated (Lyons 2011).

*Reshaping the reform agenda?*

The risks of the current limited approach to workforce sustainability, and some of the problematic connections between qualifications, professionalism and wage equity that we have discussed above, may be magnified by a changing political climate in Australia. Since the election (in late 2013) of a more conservative federal government, funding commitments concerned with the workforce initiatives (made by the government originally responsible for the reform agenda) have been revoked. Changes have included: the removal (in 2015) of fee subsidies for educators living in 'areas of high need' who are undertaking university qualifications (DE 2014) and the introduction of a new professional development fund available only to those working in long day care services (Early Childhood Australia 2014). While on one hand the new professional development fund is putting support into the service type reported to be experiencing the greatest workforce challenges (Productivity Commission 2014), the removal of fee subsidies is likely to reduce the numbers of university-qualified teachers graduating and in the areas identified as in highest need.

In addition, a substantial change in the focus of early childhood policy has accompanied the change of government. This change is evident, for example, in the contrasting terms of reference of the 2011 Productivity Commission's enquiry (whose research informed the original early childhood workforce initiatives) and those of an enquiry that is (as of late 2014) underway.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has agreed on common strategic frameworks to guide government action on early childhood development, schooling and vocational education and training (VET) across Australia. Building the capability and effectiveness of the workforces in these sectors, particularly for Indigenous
people, will be critical to achieving the outcomes agreed in these frameworks. (Productivity Commission 2011, iv)

By contrast, the terms of reference for the Productivity Commission enquiry (2014, v) begin with the statement that:

The Australian Government is committed to establishing a sustainable future for a more flexible, affordable and accessible child care and early childhood learning market that helps underpin the national economy and supports the community, especially parent's choices to participate in work and learning and children's growth, welfare, learning and development.

In this way, discourses of national productivity and early childhood learning as a 'market' are amplified, while any focus on supporting the early childhood workforce (so that it might contribute to these foci) is absent. It seems that despite the extensive body of literature outlining the need for cross-jurisdictional, multi-level workforce strategies, Australia's current federal government is taking a fragmentary approach to workforce sustainability, just as the early childhood sector itself is becoming more integrated via national quality standards and curricular guidelines.

We are not alone in our concerns regarding the effectiveness of Australia's current workforce initiatives for delivering on the policy intent to build a 'sustainable, high quality ECEC workforce' (SCSEECE 2012, 3). For example, in relation to the emphasis upon gaining or upgrading qualifications in the Early Years Workforce Strategy, Australia's Health and Community Services Workforce Council points out that:

Initiatives to increase the supply of ECD [early childhood development] workers have often resulted in high churn in industries with many people being trained but only a small proportion of these staying in the industries. Training is one part of workforce planning and development and a primary focus on training and qualifications often discounts other critical factors... (quoted in Productivity Commission 2011, 287).

Similar concerns are also raised by Cheeseman and Torr (2009, 71), who note of the Workforce Initiatives (as illustrated in Figure 1) that: 'While attention is given to recruiting students into training places, there has at this time been no announcement regarding strategies to address the long-term difficulties of retaining staff in the prior to school sector'. Five years later, additional, targeted strategies for workforce retention have not been introduced, demand for educators continues to rise and dissatisfaction is reported to have increased among educators working in prior-to-school settings, especially long day care, preschool and family day care settings (The Social Research Centre 2014, 4). Given the limited focus of the workforce strategy, the problematic premises underpinning its focus on qualifications, the exclusion of measures to improve wage equity, the revocation of some funding support and the long-term sustainability the strategy is aiming for may not be 'delivered' (SCSEECE 2012, 3).
(Re)thinking the sustainability of the early childhood workforce

In the critical reading above, we outlined some of the reasons that we (and others) contend there may be limits to the effectiveness of the workforce strategy for long-term workforce sustainability. Yet, the premise with which we opened the article remains salient - that sustaining early childhood educators, and the workforce they comprise, is critical to achieving good outcomes for children through early childhood education. With this in mind, we now turn to thinking about how discourses of sustainability could be better mobilised to open up other possibilities for addressing entrenched workforce challenges. We begin with a brief discussion of two conceptualisations of sustainability then put these ideas to work in rethinking ideas of workforce sustainability.

Discourses of sustainability

Sustainability is a powerful concept for thinking about equity, resources, obligations and the connections of the present and future. Its origins lie in concerns about global environmental degradation and the need to balance the needs of the present with those of the future (World Commission on Environment and Development 1992). Despite its powerful discursive potential for guiding transformation, the ubiquity of sustainability in policy and public discussions can reduce this potential to a cliché. This effect (evident, we argue, in the ways workforce sustainability is used in Australia’s Early Years Workforce Strategy) may be to limit rather than amplify its transformative potential as a concept. However, sustainability can also be conceptualised as a process that is:

dynamic rather than static, as a means rather than an end, as a challenge for continuous cultural and social change rather than a once and for all measurable outcome, and... challenging in terms of the development of global solidarity and justice (Hägg 2008, 52).

This conceptualisation disrupts the idea that sustainability is something that can be (in the words of the workforce strategy) ‘delivered’ (SCSEEC 2012, 3). Rather, through this conceptualisation, sustainability can be understood as an ongoing process that has a politics of change and negotiation and interconnections with the local and global. This understanding may then offer another way of thinking about workforce sustainability - as a negotiated, ongoing process of transformation rather than an end state.

An expanded conceptualisation of sustainability also invites different questions - the purpose of which is to open new possibilities, not simply to define what things are, or to continue to work from ‘stability of the already given’ (May 2005, 121). Research drawing on post-structural theory to rethink early childhood pedagogies has suggested (for example) that ‘the large-scale is [not necessarily] more significant than what might be happening locally at the micro level’ (Blaise 2013, 189). Indeed, as Olsson (2009) (a researcher drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts) argues that ‘...it is always the micro-political that decides the making or breaking of the process’ (2009, 75). As we now go on to discuss, looking beyond known workforce challenges, and large-scale approaches (such as those mentioned earlier in the article), and applying a different concept of sustainability could be a way of generating new thinking about workforce sustainability.
Rethinking workforce sustainability

One way of turning from a large- to a small-scale approach to workforce sustainability is to focus on educators' practice. Research concerned with ways educators negotiate the many elements of their practice has, for example, illuminated ways that educators developed resilience, reflexive capacity and other strategies allowing them to negotiate potentially repressive conditions (for an interpretative meta-analysis of some of this research, see Cumming et al. 2013). For example, educators in an Australian study were reported to have exercised a collective 'ethic of resistance' to dominant regulatory discourses (Fenech et al. 2010, 96), through sustained critical reflection on practice. Similarly, a study conducted in the UK reported on educators' invocation of a 'professionalism from within' (Osgood 2010, 126) that allowed them to express ways of being a professional that did not rely upon the dominant discourses of professionalism otherwise available to them. Further exploration of educators' capacities for reworkings of the 'little territories of the everyday' (Rose 1999, 280) (in ways such as those outlined above) might help generate other possibilities for sustaining educators and the workforce they comprise. This may be especially so in the Australian context, where the complexities of early childhood practice have already been recognised in policy documents (Cumming et al. 2014).

At the same time, as Press and Skattebol (2007) and Osgood (2009) caution, an increased focus on the micro-politics of educators' practice should not preclude further attention to the productive capacity of macro-political flows to effect change (through policy initiatives in particular). For example, as a means of balancing the possibilities offered by micro- and macro-political movements, Press and Skattebol promote the possibilities of: "...political action that recognise[s] and generate[s] localised responses, whilst at the same time engendering policy that enables more broadly based social justice" (180). In the Australian context, this could take the form of continued engagement by the early childhood sector in the 'contestation involved in policy development and implementation' (Press and Skattebol 2007, 182) via, for instance, lobbying ministers, promoting the impacts of changes or contributing to the reshaping of the early childhood reform agenda.

Concluding thoughts

In this article, we have argued that addressing entrenched workforce challenges such as sustainability is in the interests of children, families and the broader economy, as well as educators themselves. However, as we have also endeavoured to show, the focus in Australia's Early Years Workforce Strategy on qualifications and credentials-based discourses of professionalism offer only a limited approach to supporting workforce sustainability. This approach may be (we argue) inadequate to support and sustain the early childhood workforce in the long term, nor effectively support the goals of the broader reform agenda.

Looking beyond the known challenges to workforce sustainability has helped generate new possibilities for thinking differently about supporting and sustaining Australia's early childhood workforce. In particular, better mobilising discourses of sustainability, and further exploration of the micro-politics of educators' practice, are two ways we have suggested new possibilities could be generated for approaching seemingly entrenched workforce challenges. We have also recognised the potential of macro-political forces (in
particular, policy initiatives) for addressing challenges in a more systemic way. Along with a focus on ways educators negotiate elements of early childhood practice then, exploring the relations between micro- and macro-politics - how they work and what they produce (to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari 1987) - may be another way of generating additional possibilities for addressing workforce sustainability.

Endnotes

4 In this article, early childhood educators (or ‘educators’) are practitioners (regardless of level of qualification) who ‘...work directly with children in early childhood settings’ (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2009, 5).

5 COAG is comprised of Australia’s federal government, along with its six states, and two territory governments.

6 Even in 2013, Australia’s investment in early childhood education was still only around 0.4%. This is 0.3% lower than the OECD average (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013) and 0.6% lower than the minimum recommended by (UNICEF 2008).

7 Approved care services (the dominant category of care) are those long day care, approved by government as meeting the eligibility standards and requirements to provide care for the purposes of Child Care Benefit (CCB). Long day care, family day care and outside school hours care are also required to satisfy the National Quality Framework. Approved care attracts both the Child Care Rebate (CCR) and CCB for those that use it (Productivity Commission 2014, 77). Other non-mainstream services offered as part of the early childhood sector include: mobile child care services, Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s services (MACS), Indigenous playgroups, outside school hours care, flexible services and indigenous enrichment programmes and creches (Productivity Commission 2014, 92).

8 We conceptualise discourses as codified, sometimes dominant ways of thinking and speaking about things. Discourses can have productive as well as repressive potential.

9 Features identified by Whitebook and Ryan included: the impacts of ‘variations in staffing patterns and the background of other teachers’ or ‘the degree of support in the workplace for ongoing teacher development through policies related to mentoring, professional development opportunities and paid planning and meeting time’ (2011, 6).

10 Areas of high need are defined as regional or remote areas, indigenous communities, or areas of high socio-economic disadvantage based on postcode location’ (DE 2014).

11 The Productivity Commission is the Australian Government’s independent research and advisory body on a range of economic, social, and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians. Its role...is to help governments make better policies in the long term interest of the Australian community. [In particular] the Commission’s focus is on ways of achieving a more productive economy (Productivity Commission n.d.)

12 Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concepts of the micro- and macro-political are not sociological categories such as structure and agency that can infer an essential hierarchy and set of relations. Rather, they are types of movements - that regularise, organise and sometimes limit possibilities (macro-political movements) and that disrupt and reshape stabilisations (micro-political movements). These movements are understood to be mutually engaged in relays of stabilisation, de- and re-stabilisation that create the conditions of reality.
Competing Interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors’ contributions
TC conceptualized the argument, conducted the policy analysis and interpretation, and drafted the manuscript; JS contributed to the arguments and scope of the analysis; both JS and SW provided critical revisions that also contributed to the policy interpretation and implications. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Acknowledgements
The authors gratefully acknowledge the extensive comments and suggestions given by peer reviewers of this article.

Received: 3 June 2014 Accepted: 15 January 2015
Published online: 11 March 2015

References


Part Two:

Literature Review
Article Two

Reading between the Lines: an interpretative meta-analysis of ways early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing practice

TAMARA CUMMING, JENNIFER SUMSION & SANDIE WONG
Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education,
Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, Australia

ABSTRACT Considerable attention has been paid across international contexts to structural factors affecting the sustainability of the early childhood workforce. While attention to these elements is vital, it can nevertheless overshadow less tangible elements that may contribute to, or assist in addressing, problems of workforce sustainability. In particular, an existing body of literature suggests that discourses and subjectivities play an important role in informing early childhood practice. In this article we report on an interpretative meta-analysis of 38 empirical studies from 9 countries, which are concerned with ways early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice. We found that early childhood educators participating in these empirical studies used a highly complex set of strategies to negotiate the relations of power that operate within and between discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice. We conclude that understanding more about ways early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities has the potential to inform efforts to address problems of workforce sustainability, and is worthy of further study.

Introduction

Workforce sustainability in the prior-to-school early childhood sector continues to be a critical policy challenge internationally (Blackburn, 2006; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006; Productivity Commission, 2011). There has been a considerable amount of research and policy attention relating to the effects on recruitment, retention and attrition, of pay, status and conditions incommensurate with the responsibility and skill required of early childhood educators (ECs) [1] (UNICEF, 2008; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2012), as well as debate regarding the role of ECs’ qualification levels in exacerbating or ameliorating problems of workforce retention (see for example, Mead & Carey, 2011; Whitebook et al, 2012). Nevertheless, research across national contexts suggests that rates of staff turnover within the early childhood sector, and rates of attrition from the sector altogether, continue to be problematic for children, families, and for ECs themselves (UNICEF, 2008; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2012). Attention to structural elements and issues is vital, but, can however, overshadow ‘less tangible’ elements that may contribute to, or assist in addressing, problems of workforce sustainability. For example, an existing body of literature relating to the early childhood field suggests that prominent discourses – such as those of professionalism (Sumison, 2005; Osgood, 2006; Karila, 2008; Kuisma & Sandberg, 2008; Urban, 2008; Woodrow, 2008; Osgood, 2009; Duhn, 2010) and quality (Oberhuerner, 2004; Tobin, 2005; Dahlberg et al, 2007; Ishimine et al, 2009; Moss, 2010) – might impact on ECs’ perceptions of their work, and the rewards they obtain from it. We argue, therefore, that it is essential to explore ‘less tangible’, discursive and subjective elements

http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2013.14.3.223
such as these, whilst at the same time, acknowledging their interconnectedness with structural elements and issues.

A drawback of the literature concerned with these ‘less tangible’ elements of early childhood practice is that much of it is conceptual rather than empirical, making it difficult to draw out implications for workforce sustainability. At the same time, there is a rapidly emerging body of empirical studies investigating ways in which discourses and subjectivities inform early childhood practice. However, as Nuttall et al. (2006) have shown in their review of Australian research into teacher education, a proliferation of empirical studies does not necessarily provide a sound base for informing policy or practice. They suggest that this is especially the case if studies are small in scale, isolated, have a relatively weak epistemological underpinning, and are of variable quality. It seems timely, therefore, to review empirical studies investigating how discourses and subjectivities inform early childhood practice in order to gain a preliminary sense of their capacity, as a body of work, to inform efforts to address early childhood workforce sustainability. The purpose of this article is to report on an interpretative meta-analysis of qualitative studies concerned with some of the ways ECCEs negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice. The article begins with a brief explanation of Foucauldian perspectives on discourses and subjectivities, which frame the interpretative meta-analysis. A discussion of the methodology, a descriptive overview of the studies analysed, and a discussion of the findings of the meta-analysis, with reference to theoretical resources from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Davies and Cannon (2006) follows. The article concludes with a consideration of the limitations of the meta-analysis and implications for future enquiry.

**Discourses and Subjectivities**

Our interpretative meta-analysis is based on a Foucauldian reading of discourses as codified patterns for naming and discussing things, that both describe and ‘form the objects [and subjects] of which they speak’ (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Dominant (or hegemonic) discourses may have a ‘decisive influence on a specific practice’ (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 31), defining and producing what is ‘known’, and what and how things are talked about (Kamler & Thomson, 2006, p. 11). By appearing incontestable, dominant discourses can restrict the recognition of viable alternatives. However, as Foucault (1980) asserts, discourses are formed in relations of power, and therefore have the potential to be productive, as well as repressive. Accordingly, people constitute themselves as subjects in the ways they negotiate these repressive and productive potentials of discourses. Their subjectivities are then, ‘provisional, contingent [and] constructed’ ways of being (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 23), formed through the social negotiation of relations of power (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 344).

**Methodology**

This article is based upon an interpretative meta-analysis of empirical studies approach – by which we mean an analysis of our interpretations of data reported by other researchers (i.e. our own secondary analysis of primary data), and of the interpretations of the original researchers (i.e. interpreting interpretations) (Weed, 2005). We have drawn on some features of meta-interpretable approaches, such as theoretical sensitivity, dialogical search and analysis methods, and approaching the synthesis of data and interpretation from previous studies as an analytic, rather than purely descriptive project. At the same time, we acknowledge that secondary analysis of qualitative data is contentious. Weed (2005), for example, implies that the interpretations of subsequent researchers may vary from those of the original researchers, who were more familiar with the context, and were working from the original data. However, from a post-structural perspective, analysis and representation of ‘data’ involves acknowledging the positionality rather than the neutrality of researchers, the partiality of any ‘account’ of another’s actions, and the impossibility of a ‘true’ interpretation (Davies, 2006; Lincoln et al., 2011). Further, as Kamler and Thomson (2006, p. 11) suggest, we see research writing as a discursive activity, involving the representation of authors’ conceptualisations of reality, shaped through choices of what to include, exclude, foreground and critique. Therefore, with Weed’s (2005) concerns in mind, we have tried
to be as transparent as possible about the search and analysis strategies used, and about clarifying the nature of the source material referred to, whilst retaining a post-structural approach to reanalysing primary data, and 'interpreting interpretations'.

Search Strategy

A number of search strategies were used to locate literature concerned with ways ECEs negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice. These strategies included: keyword and controlled-vocabulary searches of peer-reviewed journals using relevant databases, manual searches of relevant special issues of journals [2], and 'following ... citational trails' (St Pierre, 2001, p. 147) to locate additional references. For reasons of manageability, and because in some instances peer review status was unclear, otherwise relevant books (e.g. Osgood, 2012), as well as book chapters (e.g. Grishaber, 2001; Blaise, 2009), were excluded.

A search of peer-reviewed journals from 1994-2011 [3] in the EBSCOhost Education, Taylor & Francis Online, A+ Education, Sage Journals Online and Expanded Academic ASAP databases was undertaken by the first author (Tamara). Based upon definitions in the EBSCOhost Education thesaurus, the initial search used the terms 'early childhood educators' (in 'all subject fields') AND 'study' (in 'abstract' field), subsequently adding OR 'preschool teachers' OR 'kindergarten teachers' [4] (in 'all subject fields'). Where the search generated a large number of hits (>400), additional limiting terms such as NO 'elementary and secondary schools' in 'all subject fields' were used. Of the 217 articles identified, 42 met the following criteria for inclusion:

- Empirical studies containing qualitative data (such as excerpts from interview transcripts or focus group responses), and reporting practitioner perspectives;
- Primarily conducted in prior-to-school early childhood contexts [5]; and
- Involving ECEs with and without formal qualifications in early childhood education, and those 'pre-service' and working in the field.

See Table I for an overview of the studies selected for inclusion in the interpretative meta-analysis.
Some participants in this study were working in early years of school.

Unless otherwise specified in an article, the total number of participants in a study is included here. Where a subset of the total participation was the subject of an article, it is this subset that is used as the 'number of participants in the study'. These articles are indicated with a #.

Table I. Studies reviewed for interpretative meta-analysis.

Phases of the Meta-analysis

The interpretative meta-analysis was undertaken in two phases. The first phase involved a descriptive analysis of the key features of the studies selected, and a broad brush, thematic analysis of their key findings. The second phase involved more in-depth, theoretically-informed analyses grounded in the Foucauldian notions of discourse and subjectivities referred to previously, along with theoretical resources from Deleuze (1993), Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Davies and Gannon (2006) (these are outlined later in the article).

Phase 1: descriptive overview of the selected studies. As outlined in Table I, the 38 studies analysed [6] were undertaken in Australia (15), the United Kingdom (UK) (8), the United States of America (USA) (5), New Zealand (4), Sweden (2), Canada (1), Finland (1), Iceland (1) and South Korea (1).
The majority of studies (25 out of 38) were conducted with degree-qualified (or equivalent) participants working in prior-to-school settings, with between 1-40 years of experience. Only 5 of the 38 studies were conducted with ‘pre-service’ ECEs, 3 involving participants in degree programmes, and 2 in non-degree programmes. Four studies did not specify ECEs’ qualifications. Teacher educators and children were included in some participant cohorts – teacher educators in Einarsdottir (2003), Sargent (2004), Colley (2006), Langford (2007), and Andersson & Hellberg (2009), and children in Giugni (2011) and Skattebol (2003). However, given the focus of this article upon ECEs, these other accounts have not formed part of our analysis.[7] Numbers of participants varied between 1 and 255, with an average of around 30 participants. Eighteen studies included participants located in areas identified by authors as ‘metropolitan’ and/or ‘cities’, with a much lower proportion (7 out of 38) including participants in ‘regional’, ‘rural’ and/or ‘remote’ areas. Of the 38 studies, a total of 9 did not specify participants’ geographic location.

The studies reflected a range of theoretical perspectives – drawing, for example, on post-structural and critical theories in Fenech and Sumston (2007a, b), Surtees (2008) and Giugni (2011); sociocultural theories in Edwards (2005, 2006); feminist and reconceptualist theories (Osgood, 2004, 2010; Skattebol, 2010), and attachment theories (Elfer & Dearnley, 2007). Individual interviews were the most commonly used data collection method (30 out of 38), followed by observation (15 out of 38), reflective statements (12 out of 38), and group-based discussions (13 out of 38), then stimulus (9), document analysis (6), questionnaires (5) and arts-informed research (3). Validated scales or pre-existing statistical data were each used in only one study. Multiple methods of data collection were used in 29 of the 38 studies.

In literature from the UK, Australia, Canada and the USA, there were distinctive patterns of locally relevant concerns. For example, studies conducted in the UK by Brooker (2010), Colley (2006), Elfer and Dearnley (2007), Moyle (2001) and Osgood (2004) dealt primarily with discourses of professionalism, and their relationships with aspects of subjectivity, such as emotionality (Colley, 2006; Elfer & Dearnley, 2007; Osgood, 2010), passion (Moyle, 2001) and class identification (Osgood, 2004, 2010; Colley, 2006; Brooker, 2010). These concerns seemed often to coincide with, or respond to, the introduction in the UK in 2007 of the ‘Early Years Professional Status’, a scheme criticised for basing ECEs’ ‘professionalism’ on their attainment of accredited, tertiary qualifications, without recognising the existing professional expertise of many ‘unqualified’ ECEs (Osgood, 2012).

In Australia, new regulatory schemes are also being introduced (see for example, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care [Council of Australian Governments, 2009]). Yet, rather than reinvigorating a focus upon ‘emotionality’ as a counter-discourse to regulatory regimes (as in, Moyle, 2001; Osgood, 2010), the Australian studies tended to explore and highlight the complexity of ECEs’ professional practice, their intellectual capacities and critical engagement (Skattebol, 2003; Edwards, 2005; Fenech & Sumston, 2007b; Fenech et al, 2010; Giugni, 2011). By contrast, studies conducted in the USA and Canada were mainly concerned with tensions between culturally and epistemologically hegemonic discourses constituting ‘good’ practice (Garavuso, 2007; Moore & Gilliard, 2007; Sisson, 2009; Adair, 2011), and being a ‘good’ ECE (Langford, 2008).

There was also recurrent attention to particular topics across national contexts. Issues relating to the ‘commercialisation’ of early childhood (EC) services and neo-liberal policy agendas for example, were discussed in relation to the USA (Sisson, 2009), UK (Osgood, 2004), South Korea (Kim, 2004) and New Zealand (Duncan, 2007). Intersections of personal/professional beliefs and values with practice (see for example, Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Karlson & Simonsson, 2008; Brooker, 2010) were discussed by authors across all national contexts represented in this body of literature.

Phase 2: theoretically-informed analysis. The second phase of the interpretative meta-analysis was in-depth and theoretically informed. It focused upon ways in which ECEs‘negotiated’ discourses and subjectivities, and how these instances were situated in broader relations of power. We began our analysis by progressively classifying ‘instances’ under single descriptive category titles in a matrix. However, after analysing only a few articles, the complexity and interconnection of instances proved to consistently defy these singular classifications. To take account of these ‘leakages’ (Deleuze, 1993) across and between the initial categories, and the relations of power operating in and between ‘instances’, we drew upon theoretical resources from Foucault (1972) and Deleuze
and Guattari (1987) to devise a more fluid schema for the representation of these 'strategies', and their interrelationships. Figure 1 illustrates this schema.

Figure 1. Strategy cartography.

In the following analysis, we have also used these theoretical resources to conceptualise early childhood practice as an *assemblage* comprised of *territories* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) demarcated through *lines of force* (Davies, Flemmen, et al, 2006, p. 145). In the same way as Deleuze and Guattari suggest that these 'lines' may act to 'articulate, segment or stratify' territories, or to 'determinitorialise' or 'destratalise' (1987, p. 3), we see strategies such as 'conformity', 'compromise' and 'resistance' constituting 'lines of force' that form and reform 'territories' through the operation of relations of power. In order to convey a sense of ECEs' experiences of the 'movements' of these 'lines', we discuss their use of strategies for negotiating discourses and subjectivities in terms of working 'with', 'against' and/or 'across' the 'grain' (Davies, Dormer, et al, 2006, p. 28). We conceptualise 'the grain' as being akin to the types of lines seen in wood and stone that might appear to be 'set', but that on closer examination, have qualities of granularity and porosity that indicate potential for 'movement'. These 'movements' might take the form of resistance, flow, rupture and/or splintering, 'along', 'with', 'against' and/or 'across' the 'grain' (Davies, 2006), depending on the action of force in and around these 'lines'. Conceptualising the dimensionality of 'lines' in this way therefore allows us to consider how relations of power may be implicated in 'movements', and ECEs' experiences of these movements.

**Strategies for Negotiating Discourses and Subjectivities Informing Early Childhood Practice**

This section elaborates on the five strategies (and their attendant sub-categories) that we have described in Figure 1. No hierarchy is intended in the ordering of these strategies.
Territorialising

The strategies we describe as ‘territorialising’ involve the use of binaries, multiple subject positions and post-structural theory to define (and sometimes defend or maintain) sanctioned, or hegemonic ‘territories’ of EC practice. For example, in Osgood’s (2010) study, ECEs invoked binaries such as personal/professional and external/internal to demarcate their understanding of what was ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the ‘territory’ of EC practice. Other authors used binaries, such as emotionally available/emotionally detached (Elfer & Dearnley, 2007; Osgood, 2010), affective/effective (Moyles, 2001) and safe/unsafe masculinity (Sargent, 2004) to delineate what they saw as singularly ‘acceptable’ ways of being within these sanctioned territories, and the ‘lines’ that defined them.

In other cases, however, authors reported that ECEs appeared to ‘adopt multiple subject positions … and express … multiple subjectivities rather than a coherent identity’ (Fenech & Sumson, 2007a, p. 117). Osgood (2010) for example, discusses ECEs’ construction of a ‘demarcated’ yet multiple professional ‘self’, with which sometimes conflicting discourses of professionalism were negotiated. Hence, educators were reported to simultaneously ‘conform … to [external] … standards’ that marked their practice as ‘professional’, whilst also subversively practising what they described as their ‘professionalism from within’ – a way of being that foregrounded affective and relational aspects of early childhood practice (p. 12). Giugni (2011) also shares an account of her use of post-structural theory to ‘transgress’ the types of demarcated territories and lines of force described above. Instead, she negotiates discourses and subjectivities through a ‘relational assemblage’ in which she is in constant and complex ‘grappling movement[s]’ or ‘knots in motion’ (p. 19), with children and more-than-human materials (such as clay). In accounts such as these, ECEs appear to negotiate ‘lines of force’ defining sanctioned territories, by working ‘across the grain’, through multiple subjectivities (such as external and internal professionalisms [Osgood, 2010]).

Fitting (oneself) into Sanctioned Territories

Next, we discuss five ways that ECEs worked ‘with the grain’ in order to ‘fit (themselves) into’ sanctioned discourses and subjectivities. We have described these strategies as: self-surveillance, self-regulation, conformity, compromise and sacrifice.

Self-surveillance/self-regulation. Reminiscent of Foucault’s ‘panopticism’ (Foucault, 1980), this first strategy involves ECEs internalising regulatory ‘gazes’ that convey an underlying ‘trust’ or ‘mistrust’ of their capacity for professional decision-making. Once internalised, ECEs may then carry out ongoing self-surveillance (Surtees, 2005) and self-regulation to keep themselves on the ‘right side of the [regulatory] fence’ (Bown & Sumson, 2007, p. 30). Sargent (2004) for example, describes ways that male ECEs internalised discourses of ‘unsafe’ masculinity through constant surveillance of any inclination to behaviours considered ‘inappropriate’ for them (such as comforting children with hugs, or having them sit on their knee). In response to their self-surveillance, the male ECEs then consciously deployed behavioural strategies that performed ‘safe’ masculinities to their female colleagues and to families. In Elfer and Dearnley (2007), the binary of safe/unsafe practice is played out by ECEs shaping professional subjectivities according to what attachment theories consider ‘safe’. By enacting self-surveillance and regulation to stay ‘safe’, ECEs assuaged their own ‘fears’ (p. 270) of behaving in ways that might potentially damage children’s ‘emotional well-being’ (p. 267).

Although vigilance to meeting ‘standards’ allowed ECEs in Bown and Sumson’s study (2007) to stay on the ‘right’ side of the self-demarcated ‘fence’, they also suggest that the internalisation of regulatory discourses appeared to undermine ECEs’ confidence in their professional judgment, and to ‘impinge … on their professional freedom, integrity and passion for teaching’ (p. 30). Sargent (2004, p. 177) also states that male ECEs in his study felt their professional subjectivities were consistently ‘confined within a narrow field of play by the suspicion of others’, whilst ECEs in Elfer and Dearnley’s study were reported to find that processes of reframing personal experience, beliefs and emotions to go ‘with the grain’ of acceptable practice ‘often involve[d] … discomfort and upset’ (2007, p. 277). Regulatory discourses claim to promote discourses of ‘quality’ and ‘safety’ (Fenech et al, 2008; Urban, 2008), yet, the ECEs’ experiences related above suggest that this may not extend to
ECEs themselves. Rather, it seems that using strategies of self-surveillance and self-regulation sometimes means that working 'with' the grain can be an uneasy experience, that may also rob ECEs of the opportunity to exercise professional autonomy, and potentially undermine their professional confidence, engagement and satisfaction ( Moriarty, 2000; Robson & Fumoto, 2009).

Conforming with hegemonic discourses and subjectivities. Educators also negotiated discourses and subjectivities by 'conforming' to hegemonic discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice with (apparently) 'unquestioning compliance' (Bown & Sumson, 2007, p. 44). Examples included ECEs enacting the 'best practice' of home visiting prior to a child attending an early years setting for the first time, regardless of the family context or preference (Brooker, 2010). In another case, ECEs 'recognized, managed, and denied' their culturally-diverse beliefs and values for raising and teaching children, in favour of achieving a culturally hegemonic 'identity' of the 'good ECE', that was based upon 'universal' child development knowledge ( Langford, 2007, p. 333).

In these examples, willingness to work 'with' the grain (that in these cases, defined territories of 'best' practice and 'good' ECEs) might appear to position these ECEs as compliant or 'docile' bodies ( Foucault, 1977). However, it is also important to acknowledge the impact of other related factors on ECEs' ability to seek alternatives to conformity. As Garavuso (2007, p. 67) suggests of ECEs from 'minority' backgrounds, for example, conformity or compromise may appear the only choices when ECEs feel disempowered by rigid workplace hierarchies and regulatory regimes. Further, as Edwards (2005, 2006), and in a similar vein Skattebol (2010), point out conforming to dominant theoretical discourses (such as Developmentally Appropriate Practice) lends 'scientific' authority to ECEs' claims to expertise, and may enhance their external appearance of 'professionalism'. Finally, Nuttall (2006, p. 140) draws attention to the role of 'intersubjectivity' – the construction of self-as-subject in conjunction with others (Csordas, 2008) – in strategies of conformity, as she discusses a teacher's inability to circumvent her positioning by others in the prevailing 'institutional story' in her workplace.

Compromising. Intersubjectivities and dominant discourses that position ECEs in certain ways also appear to inform strategies of 'compromise'. Kim (2004, p. 286) for example, reports that educators working in privately-owned children's services in South Korea compromised their pedagogical values due to pressure from parents and centre directors to 'teach a curriculum with academic content'. As their two-year qualifications did not enable them to seek employment in the public system, these ECEs chose to compromise their pedagogical values in order to keep their jobs. Similarly, educators in Osgood's (2010) study reported that they struggled (p. 123) and 'wrestled' (p. 23) to reconcile their 'personal philosophy and working ethos' (p. 123) with the lure of external standards marking them as 'professional'. Although obtaining certification as an 'Early Years Professional' increased their 'status', Osgood (p. 125) suggests the ECEs felt that this choice required them to compromise the relational 'authentic professional subjectivities' that had personal resonance for them as 'good' practice.

Sacrificing. Based upon her observations of professional cultures amongst ECEs in the UK, Osgood (2010, p. 126) also describes a 'culture of care characterised by affectivity, altruism, self-sacrifice and conscientiousness'. Whilst this professional 'culture' cannot be generalised wholesale across contexts, strategies of self-sacrifice were used by other ECEs in the studies we analysed to 'fit themselves into' sanctioned territories within their settings. Mindful of possible impacts upon families, educators in Moyles's (2001) study for example, limited their use of theoretical approaches in order to foster peaceful rather than adversarial professional cultures in their workplaces. In Bown and Sumson's (2007, p. 44) study, ECEs 'fitted (themselves) into' a sanctioned 'territory' of professionalism by proving that they were not 'self-interested or selfish' through acts of 'professional dedication' and sacrifice 'for the sake of the children'. These 'sacrifices' included: choosing to remain in a role until the end of the year despite being very unhappy, or by consistently displaying 'selflessness and a happy demeanour' regardless of real feelings or needs (p. 39). This dynamic is echoed in Dalii (2008, p. 182), who indicates that ECEs mediated 'knowledge alongside humility' in order to 'fit in' with their colleagues. In a similar way to ECEs' experiences of conforming strategies then, the use of sacrificing strategies seemed to involve
working 'with' the grain in order to 'fit in', whilst also requiring ECEs to work 'against' the grain of their own personal abilities or preferences.

The instances of self-surveillance/self-regulation, conforming, compromising, and sacrificing strategies discussed above, illustrate some of the ways that ECEs worked 'with the grain' to 'fit themselves into' sanctioned territories as ways of negotiating dominant, sometimes hegemonic, discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice. Many of these strategies for 'fitting (themselves) in' required ECEs to adopt and/or manage multiple subject positions and intersubjectivities, as well as a range of ethical dilemmas and emotional impacts, and the 'lines of force' associated with each of these. Further, strategies used to 'fit in' also illustrate the dominance of particular professional subjectivities in the early childhood field. The construction of 'professionalisms from within' as 'subversive' in Osgood (2010, p. 119), for example, or 'resilience' as an 'alternative storyline' (Sumison, 2004), suggests the regulatory power of dominant subjectivities to sanction and restrict the options available to ECEs to understand their professional identities. In the next section we outline three strategies that ECEs used to work 'against' or 'across the grains' that can define 'territories' of early childhood practice.

**Strategic Compliance**

Being 'strategically compliant' enabled ECEs to negotiate discourses and subjectivities by appearing to work 'with' the grain (to 'fit in'), whilst simultaneously working 'against' or 'across' the grain to reposition themselves subjectively. Colley (2006), for example, reported that trainee nursery nurses (i.e. vocationally-trained educators) in London were taught appropriate emotion rules for early childhood practice, and instructed in ways to regulate themselves accordingly. However, rather than constructing this influence as repressive, ECEs willingly adopted the emotion rules as a way of accessing an apparently 'superior' social and professional status attendant with the professional subjectivity of the 'good ECE'. Strategic compliance was also used by an early childhood centre director in an Australian study (Bown & Sumison, 2007, p. 44) to displace her authority with the recognised authority of regulatory discourses. Ceding her authority in this way allowed her to deflect any negative emotional impacts of staff members' displeasure with potentially 'heavy-handed' or 'unpopular' decisions away from herself and onto regulatory discourses.

**Strategic Resistance**

As the instances of strategic compliance discussed earlier remind us, power relations are mutually constituting, have the potential to be both repressive and productive, and, that 'those who, recognize the relations of power in which they are involved ... can decide ... to resist them or escape them' (Foucault, 1980, pp. 294-295). Following on from Foucault's injunction, we next explore ways that ECEs used 'strategic resistance' to work directly, yet productively, 'against' the grain.

Fasoli and Moss (2007, p. 265), for example, report on a study with ECEs working in an Australian Aboriginal community who prioritised group or community values and needs, and then found 'ways around' dominant 'Western' discourses of regulation and accountability. Similarly, Adair (2011, p 56) reports on ways that ECEs in the USA with 'immigrant experience' foregrounded these subjectivities ahead of pedagogical ideas of what techniques best serve children coming to English as an additional language. Finally, Sisson (2009) and Karlson and Simonsson (2008) give examples of ECEs (in the USA and Sweden respectively) who resist compromising their pedagogical values (Sisson) or acceding to dominant gender constructions (Karlson & Simonsson). Instead, ECEs in these studies worked 'against' the grain by strategically advocating their values directly with parents over time.

**Critically Reflective Practices**

In the studies we analysed, critically reflective practices – through which ECEs 'appraise[e] themselves as professionals ... [along with] the social and political context within which they are located' (Osgood, 2006, p. 11) – were widely used as strategies for negotiating discourses and
subjectivities informing early childhood practice. These strategies variously involved using theoretical perspectives as resources to situate practice within socio-political and contextual relations of power (as defined by Osgood, above), but also considered how ECfEs' personal experiences, beliefs, stereotypes and perspectives might inform their practice (Edwards, 2006; Elfer & Dearley, 2007).

Theoretical perspectives and critical reflection as resources. In Fenech and Sumison's study (2007b, p. 119), ECfEs fuelled a collective 'ethic of resistance' via critical reflexivity with which they 'challeng[ed] taken-for-granted assumptions and truths, and interrogat[ed] the social and political underpinnings and ramifications of accepted ways of practice'. The use of theoretically-informed critical reflection also enabled ECfEs to imagine 'other possibilities' for themselves – in their 'professional' roles (Fenech & Sumison, 2007b; Langford, 2008; Andersson & Hellberg, 2009; Giugni, 2011), in relation to policy (Osgood, 2010), to make links with their 'intuitive' understandings (Moyle, 2001; Johansson et al., 2007), and as the basis for advocating and justifying their practice choices (Moyle, 2001; Edwards, 2005, 2006; Fenech & Sumison, 2007a; Sisson, 2009). Educators in the studies we analysed attributed their development of capacity for critical reflexivity to involvement in (for example): university-level study (Fenech & Sumison, 2007b); professional learning (Moyle, 2001; Edwards, 2005, 2006; Fenech et al., 2010; Osgood, 2010); and/or by taking part in research projects that involved their engagement with critically reflective practices (Moyle, 2001; Edwards, 2005, 2006; Brown & Sumison, 2007; Fenech & Sumison, 2007b; Fenech et al., 2010).

Having theoretical resources and critically reflective practices to draw upon seemed to enhance ECfEs' construction of their practice as 'intellectual' work (Sumison, 2004, p. 288), rather than being limited to powerful discourses of emotionality and/or maternalism as definitive characteristics of early childhood practice (Sumison, 1999, 2003a; Moyle, 2001; Dalli, 2008). Researchers also reported that ECfEs who gained experience using theoretical resources and critically reflexive strategies then appeared to have 'greater self-confidence' (Osgood, 2010, p. 130) and to engage in their practice in a 'more sophisticated' way (Moyle, 2001, p. 91) than they had previously.

Although critically reflective practices aim to facilitate transformation (Urban, 2008), instances identified in our analysis suggested that critical reflection might not always be experienced initially by ECfEs as 'empowering'. One ECfE in Fenech et al.'s study (2010, p. 97), for example, noted that at first engaging in critical reflection is 'like opening your underwear drawer. It can be very confronting to have someone rifle through your thoughts and disagree with your ideas'. Edwards (2006, p. 241) also reports ECfEs initial 'unease' as they were encouraged to 'see ... what frames [their] seeing' (Lather, 1993, p. 675) in order to renegotiate dominant theoretical discourses informing their practice. However, authors noted that once ECfEs gained experience and expertise in utilising theoretical resources, they had the confidence to question dominant discourses (Moyle, 2001; Edwards, 2005, 2006) and to reconsider the scope of their roles.

These experiences of developing critically reflective approaches to practice, bear out St Pierre's (2001, p. 142) observation that 'different theories of the subject make possible different lives'. In relation to early childhood practice contexts, this might mean that ways in which ECfEs are subjected, or create themselves as subjects, could depend in part on what theory of the 'self' they hold, and what relationship ECfEs imagine this 'self' has, should, or could have, with territories of early childhood practice.

Personal critical reflection. Instances in the studies we analysed also suggested a number of issues relating to the use of critical reflection as a strategy for negotiating discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice. Fenech and Sumison (2007a), for example, caution that focusing upon individual professional experiences rather than taking a broader critical view can simply reinforce dominant discourses and subjectivities, rather than recognising and challenging the power relations shaping systems themselves. This was evident in Sumison's earlier (1999) study of a male ECfE whose attempts to challenge stereotypes of men working in childcare ultimately failed. In this case, the male ECfE's commitment to, and investment in his work, were not enough to challenge dominant discourses positioning him as having 'paedophilic tendencies' simply because he was a male.
Further, as a subset of studies demonstrated, personal critical reflection may also act as a conduit for shaping hegemonic professional subjectivities. Moyles (2001), for example, reports accounts of ECEs’ ‘passion’ to engage reflexively with their own experiences in order to understand what implications this might have for their practice. At the same time, however, greater self-confidence appeared to intersect with heroic or self-sacrificing discourses. These discourses appeared to shape subjectivities through which ECEs gained the ‘confidence to tackle [opponents]’, and feel ‘prepared to be torn apart’ as they undertook ongoing reflective practices ‘whatever the emotional costs to themselves’ or ‘however painful this [might be]’ (p. 90). Images used by ECEs to describe their encounters with personal critical reflection – such as tackle/torn, apart/painful – are reminiscent of the ‘violence’ Foucault (2000, p. 341) describes as ‘forc[ing], bend[ing], break[ing], destroy[ing], or close[ing] off all possibilities’. However, we do not know from accounts such as those included by Moyles (2001) whether these subjectivities are experienced as repressive or empowering, nor what the long-term effects of the performance of these subjectivities might be. As Sumson (2003a) indicates, however, reflection without criticality increases its potential to be deployed as a technology of the self (Foucault, 1998, p. 18). In this way, reflective practices have the potential to be used by ECEs to ‘control ... and make [themselves] appropriate to the culture or context’ (Davies, Browne, et al, 2006, p. 103). This is demonstrated in the ‘territorialising’ and ‘fitting’ strategies discussed above, as well as to be used to ‘liberate [themselves] from ... determining forces of discourse and culture’, as in the strategies of ‘strategic compliance’ and ‘strategic resistance’ above. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge the potential of critically reflective practices (and their reflexive inscription in practice) to act as both/either a conduit for normalising or transforming relations of power (Skattebol, 2010). This is perhaps particularly salient in a field such as early childhood, where, as Osgood (2010, p. 125) suggests, ECEs’ ‘personal histories and subjective experiences ... come to inflect and shape ... professional [subjectivities].

Limitations of the Interpretative Meta-analysis

We have endeavoured to ensure the ‘integrity’ of our interpretative meta-analysis through a number of measures: by providing a ‘transparent audit trail’ of our search strategy; making clear reasons for exclusion; and including only articles published in peer-reviewed journals so that studies included in the analysis meet widely accepted standards of ‘good quality research’ (Weed, 2005). However, although our purpose in this article was not to review all available material, the exclusion of conference and thesis materials, along with material published in book form, could be said to limit the comprehensiveness of our analysis (Nuttall et al, 2006). Moreover, our search was limited to articles published in English and the preponderance of studies from Australia in the articles selected for inclusion may raise questions about whether, despite our best intentions, we have inadvertently adopted search and selection strategies that favour the national context with which we are most familiar. Similarly, it is also possible that had we widened the search terms to explicitly include ‘pre-service’ ECEs, the body of source articles that met our criteria may have been considerably larger than the corpus of 42 articles included in the analysis. Finally, due to the meta-interpretative purpose of our article, our analysis has not made distinctions between ECEs’ negotiation of discourses and subjectivities based upon variables such as their qualifications, which could also yield further insights.

Nevertheless, we suggest that our interpretative meta-analysis provides some valuable insights into the extent and findings of existing empirical studies concerned with ways early childhood educators (both pre-service and practicing) negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice. The findings reported suggest, for example, that this is a body of literature that (in terms of Nuttall et al’s [2006] critique of Australian teacher education research) provides a firm basis for further enquiry. Although many studies analysed in this article are isolated and small-scale, others report on studies that are multi-national (Moriarty, 2000; Adair, 2011), multi-stage (Brownlee et al, 2000; Edwards, 2005, 2006; Colley, 2006; Langford, 2007, 2008), and multi-site (Karlson & Simonsson, 2008; Osgood, 2010). Many studies also demonstrated ‘exploration of’ concepts or theoretical standpoints that might offer new or alternative insights’ (Nuttall et al, 2006, p. 325), via in-depth engagement with theoretical and epistemological concerns (Skattebol, 2003; Edwards, 2005, 2006; Surtees, 2005; Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006; Colley, 2006;
Implications for Further Enquiry

The focus of this article has been on the ways ECEs have negotiated discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice, rather than upon the discourses and subjectivities themselves. However, within the corpus of articles we analysed, it seems important to note the focus upon ways ECEs negotiated discourses of regulation and professionalism in particular, perhaps suggesting the current importance of these discourses to the field. At the same time, however, from a Foucauldian perspective, this attention could also be read to indicate the relative privileging (and potential reinforcement) of discourses of regulation and professionalism over other, less visible discourses. Similarly, in this body of studies, the focus is heavily upon those already working (rather than those undertaking pre-service study), and also upon those completing, or having completed, degree-level qualifications. The ‘silences’ (Surtees, 2008) that these foci indicate raise important questions about ‘whose’ early childhood practice we are hearing about, and what constructions of early childhood practice are being represented. In an effort to understand more about ECEs’ experiences of negotiating discourses and subjectivities, and consider how these experiences might relate to the sustainability of the early childhood workforce, we could engage with ECEs with a broader range of qualifications, and explore relationships between different qualifications and discursive negotiation. Additional research with this wider group of participants might also increase understanding of some of the resources that ECEs appear to draw upon, such as subjective resources (Skattebol, 2010), or intellectual engagement (Sumison, 2004; Giugni, 2011) that may be silenced in dominant regulatory and professionalism discourses. In light of these discursive and subjective ‘silences’, calls for an increase in the early childhood evidence-base (Fenech & Sumison, 2007a; Ishimine et al, 2009) in order to better inform policy decisions (such as those aimed towards improving early childhood workforce retention), should be considered carefully. As Nuttall et al (2006, p. 322) suggest, it is possible that research methods and topics that align with regulatory and accountability regimes may be privileged, and that the ‘products’ of this research may readily form the basis for other ‘instrument[s] of governance’.

‘Reflection’ also appeared to be a pervasive ‘strategy’ for negotiating discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice in the studies included in this interpretative meta-analysis. Future studies might consider whether the apparent hegemony of this way of negotiating discourses and subjectivities might close off ‘other’ ways of fostering practical and professional learning. Accounts such as Giugni’s (2011), for example, demonstrate the potential for ‘other’ ways of expressing ECEs’ negotiation of discourses and construction of subjectivities.

A final implication for future enquiry relates to understanding what ECEs mean by ‘practice’. In many studies we analysed, the term ‘practice’ was used unproblematically to refer only to what was done as the result of the application of knowledge, experience and reflection. This representation is at odds with the multiple ‘practices’ that were evident in our interpretative meta-analysis – including relational, intellectual, meta-cognitive, ethical and moral practices. Each of these is part of early childhood ‘practice’, constituted within multiple relations of power, and constituting ‘lines of flight’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3) that may shift definitions of what early childhood practice ‘is’ and ‘can be’ (Brownlee et al, 2000; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This multiple and relational image of early childhood practice poses a challenge to conceptualisations that construct it as task-based work requiring only standardised training, and the application of a quantifiable and cohesive body of knowledge or techniques to be ‘effective’.

Conclusion

In this article we have presented findings from an interpretative meta-analysis of empirical studies concerned with ways ECEs negotiated discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice. Our findings indicate that ECEs used multiple strategies to negotiate the relations of power that operate within and between these discourses and subjectivities, and the ‘territories’ that
are formed and reformed through this ongoing and highly complex set of 'movements' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In order to negotiate the multiple power relations involved in these 'movements', educators in the studies reviewed often operated multiple subject positions simultaneously—sometimes in ways that created conflict between 'personal' and 'professional' interests, or caused them distress. We also identified a number of tensions associated with working 'with the grain' defining 'sanctioned' territories of early childhood practice, including disconnects between internal/external 'professionalisms', and between internal/external values of status and 'integrity'; the use of strategies of self-surveillance and self-regulation to negotiate regulatory 'mistrust'; relations between 'fear' and the construction of safe/unsafe practice binaries; and, ethical and emotional implications of conformity or resistance to hegemonic discourses, and of choices to compromise personal and/or pedagogical values. Our findings also illustrated ways that ECEs worked 'across' or 'against' the grain via strategic compliance and resistance, allowing them to reinscribe what might have been considered 'repressive' discourses as 'productive'. Lastly, we found that ECEs used theoretical resources and critically reflective strategies to challenge hegemonic discourses, and to consider how their 'personal' values and beliefs might impact upon their practice. In exploring some of the ways that ECEs negotiated discourses and subjectivities, early childhood practice appeared as embodied, mutually-constituting, multiple, negotiated and interrelated, rather than the product of the linear application of standardised knowledge and skills (Dahlgberg & Moss, 2003). In this way, the complex relationships of strategies, relations of power and 'lines' that we have highlighted in this exploration of 'less tangible' aspects of early childhood practice, offers an alternative representation of early childhood practice to the (increasingly prominent) instrumentalist discourses constituting some early childhood policy (Urban, 2008). Further, it seems that additional research considering ECEs' experiences of negotiating discourses and subjectivities that underlie and are intertwined with the more visible, structural elements of early childhood practice has the potential to offer new insights into supporting the sustainability of the early childhood workforce, and therefore, merits further attention.

Acknowledgements
The authors gratefully acknowledge the thorough and insightful feedback of our two anonymous peer reviewers.

Notes
[1] The term 'early childhood educators' is used in this article to refer to practitioners (regardless of level of qualification) who work directly with children in early childhood settings (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 5).
[2] Such as the special issue on Philosophy of Early Childhood in Educational Philosophy and Theory (Farquhar & Fitzsimons, 2007), or in journals such as Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood from which articles were most often cited in our database searches. Suggestions generated by the Ex Libris bX Recommender Service embedded in the Charles Sturt University journal linking software also provided relevant additional material.
[3] We began our search from 1994 because of the burgeoning interest in and engagement with the work of Foucault and sociocultural theorists among early childhood scholars from around that time (Flear, 1995).
[4] Search terms were chosen on the basis of definitions provided in database thesauri such as the 'Education Thesaurus' in the EBSCOhost (Education) database. Taking the EBSCOhost (Education) thesaurus as an example, we chose 'early childhood educators', 'preschool teachers' and 'kindergarten teachers' (rather than 'early childhood teachers') because these terms refer specifically to prior-to-school settings.
[6] Of the 42 articles meeting the criteria for inclusion, articles by 4 of the authors were concerned with the same study (i.e. Edwards 2005, 2006; Suttees, 2005, 2008; Fenech & Summison, 2007a, b; Langford, 2007, 2008), hence, we refer to a total of 38 studies.
Tamara Cumming et al

[7] Unless otherwise specified in an article, the total number of participants in a study is included here.
Where a subset of the total participants was the subject of an article, it is this subset that is used as the 'number of participants in the study'. These articles are indicated with a '+' in Table I.

References

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2010.547652


http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2007.8.1.30

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00071001003752203


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/096697600750046192


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09595910600781150


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13502930802141600


Reading between the Lines


238
Reading between the Lines


Tamara Cumming et al.


---

TAMARA CUMMING* is a doctoral student with the Research Institute of Professional Practice, Learning and Education at Charles Sturt University (CSU), and an Associate Lecturer in Early Childhood with the School of Teacher Education, CSU. Tamara's research focuses on discursive and subjective elements of early childhood practice and their relationships to the sustainability of the early childhood workforce. Her other research interests include: the role of early childhood educators in inter-professional work, emerging research methodologies, and post-structural theory. Correspondence: tcumming@csu.edu.au

JENNIFER SUMSION is Foundation Professor of Early Childhood Education at Charles Sturt University, where she is also a research leader in the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education. Her research focuses broadly on workforce capacity building and 'quality' in early childhood education and early childhood policy. Her research is supported by a range of external funding bodies including the Australian Research Council. In 2008-2009, Jennifer was co-leader (with colleague Linda Harrison) of the national consortium that led the development of *Belonging, Being and Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). Correspondence: jsumson@csu.edu.au

SANDIE WONG is a Research Fellow within the Research Institute of Professional Practice, Learning and Education at Charles Sturt University. Sandie's research focuses broadly on the role early childhood education and intervention have in ameliorating disadvantage and reducing marginalisation. Her current research examines integrated early childhood services, collaborative practices and inter-professional working relationships. Correspondence: swong@csu.edu.au

*Contact author*
Postscript to Article 2

Since conducting the literature review reported in Article 2 in 2010-11, I have located six recently published articles that meet the criteria for inclusion in the original interpretative meta-analysis. These additional articles, published during the period 2012-2014, were located using the same search and analytic strategies reported in Article 2. Details of the research studies reported in these articles are summarised in Table 2 below. On the whole the findings of the studies reported in these articles closely aligned with the findings of the original interpretative meta-analysis. For instance, strategies of emotional self-regulation or sacrifice in order to ‘fit-in’ to ideas of professional behaviour were evident in Page and Elfer (2013). Similarly, Hu, Torr and Whiteman (2014) reported on educators struggling with compromising pedagogical principles in favour of building partnerships with families who wished their children to speak English only in early childhood settings. The studies also made visible other ways that educators negotiated complexity in early childhood practice – for example, the emotional complexity of enacting attachment pedagogies (Page & Elfer, 2013), and the need for “being open to dealing with uncertainty” (Lazzari, 2012, p.257) as an inherent part of early childhood practice.

Similar to many studies reported in Article 2, four of the six more recent studies (Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin & Vanderlee, 2013; Lazzari, 2012; Messenger, 2013; Roberts-Holmes, 2013) were concerned with issues of professionalism. These studies offered additional insights to existing literature concerning: the complexity for educators of negotiating inter-professional practice with practitioners from other disciplines (Messenger, 2013); ways of conceptualising professionalism that do not rely on credentials or qualifications alone (Harwood et al., 2013); or disjunctures between the apparent status offered by a credential (the UK Early Years Professional Status) and educators’ experiences of professional status in practical terms (Roberts-Holmes, 2013).

The more recent studies also offered insights that inform thinking in the current thesis. Lazzari (2012, p. 252) for example, focused on ways that educators (in the Italian context) undertook collective decision-making and continuous learning as means of challenging what she described as “neo-liberal influences”. These examples indicate the possibilities for “small everyday encounters, [to be] significant to the processes of change” (Blaise, 2013, p. 189) in the same way that Fenech, Sumsion and Shepherd (2010) and Karlson and Simonsson (2010) reported educators’ ways of negotiating discursive complexity in the original interpretative meta-analysis. Together, findings from these earlier and more recent
research studies inform and bolster arguments made in Article 2 for the value of continued exploration of educators’ ways of negotiating complexity.

Further, Roberts-Holmes (2013) reports the limiting influence of educators’ workplaces on their ability to shape preferred, professional ways of being. These findings suggest that educators may not always be “in control and the author of his or her own experience and meaning” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2010, p. 27) – despite holding credentials defining their professional status. Attention to ways educators negotiate complexity in early childhood practice therefore also needs to be tempered with attention to ways other elements of complexity – such as workplace or regulatory environments – are implicated in educators’ capacities to bring about change.

Insights reported in Part 2 of the thesis (including those made in this postscript) therefore make a number of contributions to the overarching argument of this thesis. Firstly, they make visible some of the elements of complexity of early childhood practice, and ways that existing studies report educators negotiate elements of complexity. Secondly, the insights contribute to a conceptualisation of the complexity of early childhood practice as an assemblage of elements. This conceptualisation enables a shift in focus beyond simply identifying elements of complexity and their connections, to looking at what is produced through the connections. This emphasis on movement, on what connections of things may produce, rather than only on what they are (Olsson, 2009), is a key part of generating possibilities for better supporting and sustaining the early childhood workforce. Thirdly and relatedly, the insights reported in Part 2 illustrate some of the politics of being an educator. In particular, that ways of being are not only shaped by levels of qualification or experience, but are always in relation to the other elements with which an educator is connected in the complexity of early childhood practice. These contributions form the basis for the next part of the thesis, in which I outline the methods of data generation and participants in the study, and methodological approaches. Article 3 provides details and challenges of the rhizoanalytic strategies used to explore the question: How do educators in Australia negotiate complexity in early childhood practice?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Participant location (as identified by the original authors)</th>
<th>Research topic</th>
<th>Number of participants in study</th>
<th>Data collection methods</th>
<th>Qualification (where specified)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin &amp; Vanderlee</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Canada, South Africa, Nigeria</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Teachers concepts of professionalism</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu, Torr &amp; Whiteman</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Using home language in EC settings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazzari</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Teachers concepts of professionalism</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messenger</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Professional and inter-professional cultures</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X, X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page &amp; Elfer</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Urban region</td>
<td>Emotional impact for educators of their interactions with children</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>X, X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberts-Holmes</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Educators’ perceptions of their professional status in relation to holding Early Years Professional Status</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>X, X</td>
<td>X, X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Additional studies published since 2012
References


Part Three:

Methodology
Introduction to Part 3: Methodology

In Part 3, I outline the methodological approaches that guided the research project, and describe the methods and strategies used for recruiting participants, for addressing ethical considerations, and for generating and analysing data (I have also dealt with questions of method in Articles 2, 4, 5 and 6). In Article 3 I give a more in-depth account of the rhizoanalytic strategies used to analyse data generated through the research project, and a reflexive account of challenges encountered in putting to work these approaches in the conduct of the research. The article also includes a discussion of ways the concept of immanent ethics (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) informed my approach to ethical issues encountered during the research project. A postscript to Article 3 addresses in further detail ways that the worthiness of my rhizoanalytic methodological approaches might be assessed.

Methodological considerations

The aim of the research project was to generate new possibilities for supporting and sustaining the workforce. Investigating the research question ‘how do early childhood educators negotiate complexity in early childhood practice?’ therefore required methodological approaches capable of generating possibilities, rather than (for example) testing theories, or developing models. These imperatives lead me to consider methodological approaches informed by post-structural theories. Rationales for using post-structural thought to inform research practices in broader educational research literature also seemed to have many points of resonance with my own research project. For example, post-structurally-informed research has been identified as especially relevant for exploring the creation of the conditions for the formation and manifestation of social practices, patterns and subjectivities (Søndergaard, 2002), to “expose limited thinking in the field [of educational research]” (Hodgson & Standish, 2009, p. 309), and to disrupt the taken-for-granted (Søndergaard, 2002).

Rhizomethodology

The generative use of post-structural theories – and particularly those of Deleuze and Guattari – in research concerned with early childhood pedagogy and practice (such as Lenz Taguchi, 2007; Olsson, 2009; Giugni, 2011; Pacini Ketchabaw, 2013) also gestured to the possibilities for using similar ways of thinking in my own research project. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concepts of rhizome – and processes of rhizoanalysis – seemed to offer a productive way of approaching my investigation of ways educators’ negotiated complexity.
Rhizoanalyses are different in every instance of use, and always in the process of becoming. They are “designed as the process of constructing a problem proceeds” (Olsson, 2009, p. 183), experimenting with connections between things, exploring how they work, and what is produced through connections (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The purpose of a rhizoanalysis then, is not to produce knowledge about phenomena, but to think differently about things in order to make possible “previously unthought questions, practices, and knowledge” (Mazzei & McCoy, 2010, p. 504). However, as Honan (2004) points out, and the variety of manifestations of rhizoanalyses bear out (see for example, Masny, 2012; Angell, 2014; Stratigos, 2015), there is no methodological model based on Deleuze and Guattari’s work. I discuss my development of rhizoanalytic methodological approaches for my research project throughout this introduction to Part 3, as well as in detail in Article 3.

Data generation considerations

From a Deleuzian perspective, there is no assumed “…given, [or] real world (data) that can be gathered together (collected) and described (analyzed and known)” (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 225). For this reason, I use the term data generation or production rather than data collection. My selection of appropriate methods for generating data was informed by existing literature, and by the work of other researchers working with ideas from Deleuze and Guattari. I was prompted to think beyond verbal and text-based methods for example, by Sumsion’s (2007, p. 323) contention that supporting workforce sustainability: “…is an indisputably complex challenge requiring the strategic mobilisation of a wide range of theoretical, political and practical resources… responses to this challenge, to date, have been generally unimaginative and ineffective”. Taking on ideas from Deleuze and Guattari during the interpretative meta-analysis (Article 2) also encouraged me to think about using inventive methods and creative concepts (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013) to explore educators’ ways of negotiating complexity.

The methods for generating data – focus groups, visual enquiry and interviews – were therefore chosen for their potential to make visible some of the “complexities, nuances and contradictions” (Martin & Kamberelis, 2013, p. 675) of educators’ experiences, through group and individual engagement. My decisions about data generation methods were also informed by an understanding that the purpose of using multiple methods was not to seek a pre-existing truth, nor to confirm a particular idea by its confirmation in multiple sources. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 5) contend, using multiple methods can be (mis)understood as triangulation, that “reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question, [however] objective reality can never be
captured”. By contrast, I think of my use of multiple methods as a way of illuminating the research question through multiple ways of seeing, and through multiple voices. These ‘ways’, ‘seeings’ and ‘voices’ are those of myself as researcher, participants, and other elements combining in data assemblages.

Findings of my interpretative meta-analysis (as reported in Article 2) also suggested the appropriateness of using multiple methods of data generation for investigating educators’ ways of negotiating complexity. Of the 38 studies reviewed, 29 used multiple methods of data collection – eight using a combination of individual interview and group based discussions and three using individual interviews and arts-informed enquiry. Moreover, 11 studies (of the 38) used critical or post-structuralist-informed theoretical approaches along with multiple methods for data generation. Similarly, in a review of literature concerned with educators’ wellbeing, Hall-Kenyon, Bullough, MacKay and Marshall (2013) found that using a wide range of data sources was appropriate for attending to complex aspects of educators’ practice.

Although I have selected established qualitative research methods, as I discuss below, I have endeavoured to disrupt and rethink the “habitual practices associated with … particular data collection method[s]” (Honan, 2014, p. 1) in order to generate new insights into ways educators negotiate complexity. One way I have done this is to think about the relations between the methods of data generation via Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of assemblages. Livesey describes assemblages (from a Deleuzian perspective) as: “complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories, that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning” (2010, p. 18). While the ‘constellation’ can be broken apart into constituting elements, the collective capacity of an assemblage exceeds what any one part could achieve alone. In the same way, I conceptualised the methods of data generation as elements that worked to illuminate the research question through their combinations – for example, combinations of data generated through the initial and follow up focus groups, or the visual materials and research conversations. Nind and Vanha (2014) describe a similar design in their project (with people who have intellectual disabilities), reasoning that having initial, then follow-up focus groups would allow participants to “bring thinking done in and since previous dialogic encounters into later focus groups enriching the dialogue and giving them more control”. They envisioned this in-between time as a “reflective space” that would also give their participants time to engage imaginatively and creatively with data, and to create
materials to bring to later group discussions, thereby “enabl[ing] ideas to flow between focus groups” (p. 4). In the same way, I envisioned the initial and follow-up focus groups as offering participants the opportunity to consider, reflect, create, talk individually with me, then revisit the dialogic space with other participants in the follow-up focus group. In this way, using multiple methods for generating data enables readings of what is produced through connections of different forms of data, in order to illuminate the research question, and the same readings could not be produced through the use of a single method alone.

**Research design**

The research project was conducted in four slightly overlapping phases: an initial focus group discussion (of two groups, each with five participants); individual participant generation of visual materials; individual interviews and a follow-up focus group discussion (with each of the two groups). Twelve educators initially volunteered to take part, however due to illness and travel difficulties for two of these volunteers, only 10 actually took part in the project. The analytic strategies used with data generated through the research project were drawn from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) idea of the rhizome, and of rhizoanalysis, and were informed by Jackson and Mazzei’s (2013) strategies of plugging in, and Masny’s (2012) descriptions of reading intensively.

**Recruitment and participants**

Recruitment efforts began with an invitation to students of Charles Sturt University’s [CSU] Bachelor of Teaching (birth to five years) degree. The number of participants recruited for the project was informed by the studies reviewed in the interpretative meta-analysis (Article 2). An average of 15 participants were involved in the majority of the studies reviewed, therefore I anticipated recruiting between 10 and 20 participants. The Bachelor of Teaching (birth to five years) degree is offered by CSU to educators with an existing qualification at diploma level, wanting to become qualified at degree level. This cohort (of over 500 students) was first approached in response to literature suggesting that the experiences students have during their preparatory programs can: “...shape the ways in which they take up, resist, or negotiate the dominant discourses about teaching, learning and being an early childhood educator” (Sumsion, 2005, p. 214). Based on the subjects required for the Bachelor of Teaching degree, I also reasoned that this cohort of educators would have some familiarity and engagement with theoretical perspectives (such as Foucault’s ideas about relations of power and discourses) through their coursework, as well as practical experience with which to contrast and illuminate theoretical perspectives. My decision was also informed by Edwards’ (2005) specification of university level
qualifications in education, and a minimum number of years’ experiences as the basis for recruiting educators to her project.

As the initial recruitment efforts yielded only four volunteers, I broadened recruitment channels. A further six participants were recruited via invitations to participate (see Appendix 1 for an example) distributed by email to the membership of two early childhood organisations. These were the New South Wales State branch of Australian Community Children’s Services – an organisation advocating for children’s access to high quality, not for profit children's services, and, the Sydney-based Social Justice in Early Childhood group. Two of the six participants also invited colleagues to join the research project, bringing the total to 10 participants. In an attempt to attract further participants, an invitation was emailed to a Sydney-based children’s services provider with whom an existing research relationship existed, however this approach did not yield additional participants.

Ten educators participated in the research project. A short profile of each of these participants is included in Appendix 2, and illustrates some aspects of their diversity. In summary, all 10 participants were women, and at the time of the project were living in New South Wales (Australia’s most populous state). Two participants were diploma-qualified (a two-year qualification gained through a vocational education and training institution), with another two undertaking university study to upgrade their existing diploma to degree qualifications. Six were already degree-qualified in early childhood education. Of these six, two were studying for additional degree qualifications (one in teaching English to adults, and the second in small business management). Seven participants were located in Sydney (Australia’s largest city), and three in regional communities (with respective populations of around 30,000, 70,000 and 240,000). Nine of the participants were working in the early childhood sector at the time of the project. Seven were working in centre-based services (long day care, preschool and multi-purpose services), one in in-home care, and one in mobile supported playgroup services. One educator had recently left her position in a long day care centre to study English language teaching. The educators ranged in age from early 20s to mid-50s, and had been working in the sector for between one and 34 years.

Throughout the thesis, all participants are referred to via pseudonyms.

Data generation

Data generation commenced once five participants had volunteered, and while recruitment of additional participants continued. The phases were undertaken sequentially, beginning
with an initial focus group. Following each of the initial focus group discussions, participants produced their visual materials. Approximately one month after the initial focus group discussion, I met individually with each participant for the research conversation. The follow up focus group discussions took place approximately six weeks after the final research conversation was held. For each of the two groups, all phases were completed within three months of the initial focus group discussion. The total duration of the data generation phases was five months, from October 2012 to February 2013.

Table 3 below, summarises the corpus of data generated through the research project – including recordings and transcripts of spoken words, recordings and notations of affective data, and the visual materials produced by participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Data generated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Initial focus group discussions</td>
<td>2 x initial group discussions with 5 participants/group</td>
<td>2 hours of discussion/group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>103 transcribed pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Visual enquiry</td>
<td>10 x participants produced visual materials in their own time</td>
<td>9 x photo collages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1x original artwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Research conversations</td>
<td>10 x one-to-one conversations 8 x in person 2 x by phone</td>
<td>15 hours of conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(total)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Follow up focus group discussions</td>
<td>1 x discussion with 4 participants 1 x discussion with 5 participants</td>
<td>2 hours of discussion/group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>88 transcribed pages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Data generated through the research project.

*Focus groups*

Focus group discussions were selected as a method of generating data, as they “rely on group processes” through which participants “interact with each other as well as the moderator” to make collective sense of key issues (Ryan, Gandha, Culbertson & Carlson, 2014, p. 329). Group processes and interactions between educators were also important in my research project due to the highly relational character of early childhood practice. Indeed, as Sumsion (2002, p. 869) has also contended, developing better understandings about workforce sustainability requires further exploration of “the interplay between personal, relational and contextual influences”.

The collective possibilities afforded by focus groups therefore seemed likely to generate insights into how educators negotiate complexity by “allow[ing] people to speak in both collective and individual voices” and, “to articulate their particular experience” whilst also
addressing the politics of their shared experiences” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 325). Additionally, from a Deleuzian perspective, focus groups seemed to allow for participants and researchers to address what happens between the ‘collective’ and the ‘individual’ by focusing on how things work, and what they produce. That is, what might a particular exchange between participants produce in terms of: the shared complexity of their exchange, the relationship in that moment, in combination with what preceded and followed, and the sensations it produced for themselves and others?

I decided on two groups of five participants each, rather than one group of 10, in order to allow more space for all participants to contribute over the 1 or 1½ hours of the discussion. As there was no intention to compare participants’ accounts on the basis of demographic features, the assignment of participants to each of the two groups was partly random, and partly purposeful. In one case for example, participants employed in the same workplace requested they be allocated between the groups as they anticipated this would allow them to speak more freely. Consistent with my commitment to inclusivity I also encouraged participants to identify any access or dietary requirements ahead of their participation. One participant subsequently identified herself as deaf, and as using hearing aids. In order to better facilitate the inclusion of the participant, and in consultation with her about the best means to do so, Australian sign language (Auslan) interpreters were present at the first focus group discussion.

As mentioned in Article 6, an expert facilitator was invited to co-facilitate the focus group discussions with me. This decision was taken partly because having multiple facilitators can allow for the documentation of aspects of discussion (for example, participants speaking over the top of each other) that might otherwise be missed in transcription of words (Kidd & Parshall, 2000), or to notice aspects of non-verbal communication that would be lost if not noted or recalled by facilitators who were present. Moreover, as Kidd and Parshall (2000) comment, less experienced moderators (like myself) sometimes lack the skills to make space for conversation between participants. In addition, as Kidd and Parshall also contend, exchanges between participants (such as agreement, disagreement, commiseration or comparison) “are fundamental processes that influence the nature and content of responses as the group progresses” (p. 294). It was therefore important to take steps to open space for multiple, intersecting perspectives between participants to be heard, and for affective data (such as looks, gestures, sensations, emotions) to be generated.
In terms of selecting facilitators for focus groups, Franz (2012) suggests that skills and background play an important role in how well focus groups generate the type and depth of data desired. For these reasons, I invited Dr Joy Goodfellow to conduct the groups with me. Dr Goodfellow is an Adjunct of the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education at CSU. She has many years experience facilitating focus groups, as well as extensive knowledge of the Australian early childhood sector. She had also written about hidden aspects of the complexity of early childhood practice – notably practice wisdom (Goodfellow, 2003) and presence (2008), though from a more humanist theory of the subject than I was working from. I felt that our shared interest in these aspects of complexity, but from different perspectives, could help to generate more diverse data than if I had worked alone. Dr Goodfellow was the main facilitator of the first of the two initial focus groups, acting as a mentor, assisting me to gain insights and practice with strategies for eliciting and mediating discussion. I took the lead in facilitating the other three group discussions, with Dr Goodfellow offering additional probes, and helping to ensure all participants had the opportunity to contribute.

I developed prompts for the focus group discussion, along with notes that would be provided to participants ahead of their participation in the initial focus group discussion. The prompts and notes (included as Appendices 3 and 4 respectively) were informed by the style of “critically reflective questioning” that Giugni (cited in Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 54) used to “contest, theorise and critically reflect” on her practice and work for social justice and equity. The notes given to participants ahead of the initial focus group discussion drew on insights gained through the interpretative meta-analysis (Article 2) about ways educators negotiated discourses and subjectivities. However, in the prompts and notes, I framed these concepts for participants as “recognising and responding to mixed messages” (see Appendix 4). This decision was made for two reasons. Firstly, the idea of mixed messages gestured to my interest in the multiple, sometimes conflicting discursive and ‘less tangible’ aspects of practice, and messages about ‘right’ ways of being an educator, and doing early childhood practice. Secondly, the idea of recognising and responding to (mixed messages) seemed to give a practical sense of what might be involved in ‘working with’ mixed messages, and thereby focusing on ways of negotiating, rather than on what was being negotiated.

After formulating prompts for discussion, Dr Goodfellow and I met to talk through the ideas I wanted to introduce for discussion in the focus group, and to consider the number
and order of prompts. Needing to make my thinking visible to Dr Goodfellow (who led the first of the two initial focus group discussions) prompted consideration of the style of group and the role of the facilitator in the discussion. As Ryan et al. (2014) suggest, facilitation of focus groups (such as those in my research project) whose purpose is to generate data “constructed from shared ideas, opinions, beliefs, experiences, and actions” is typically “free flowing,...to allow participants to...build collective sense”, rather than to administer a more strict question and answer structure. In addition, I was most interested in hearing about the ‘less tangible’ aspects of complexity, making it important to “pay equal attention to what people say and what they do not say” (Ryan et al., 2014), or what is implied, to help make visible these sometimes tacit or taken-for-granted ways that participants negotiated complexity. I also piloted the questions with another PhD candidate (Tina Stratigos) familiar with the aims of my project, and also working in the area of early childhood education. Tina offered impressions of what she understood was being asked in each prompt, and gave examples from her own experiences of early childhood practice as sample data, enabling me to see what adjustments to the prompts might be necessary in order to best address my research question.

Visual methods

Arts-based approaches were used to gain insights into ways educators negotiate complexity in early childhood practice, as they offered possibilities for “invok[ing] beyond-text sensations… that are ineffable and invisible using conventional text-based methods” (Prosser, 2011, p. 488). In addition, arts-based approaches seemed likely to offer participants a non-verbal “tool for thinking” (Prosser, 2011, p. 488) about and expressing their ways of negotiating complexity, and potentially “elicit deep and interesting talk about subjects otherwise too complex to explore” (Birkeland, 2013, p. 456). For example, Lomax (2012) used photographs produced by young people living in council housing estates in the UK (along with their accounts of the making and meaning of the images), to disrupt dominant deficit discourses shaping and limiting ideas of what living on an ‘estate’ means. Lomax noted that using photography produced by the young people “ma[de] visible children’s lives from their perspectives, rendering meaningful what might otherwise be invisible to adult viewers and co-researchers” (2012, p. 227). This capacity for ‘making visible’ aspects of participants’ lives that might otherwise remain tacit made arts-based approaches to data generation especially relevant to my own concern with ways educators negotiate complexity.
Deleuze saw great potential in the capacity of art-making activities such as “music, literature, the cinema, and modern painting” (Kramp, 2012, n.p.) for disrupting the stabilising forces of accepted knowledge. At the same time, he is reported to have had neither “interest nor... confidence in [the] potential [of photography] to create new concepts or relationships” (Kramp, 2012, n.p.). As examples given above suggest however, it has been possible for researchers working in the area of early childhood education to use photography (and other forms of art) as part of assemblages that have successfully generated what Kramp described as “new concepts and relationships”.

In my research project, participants were encouraged to use photography as a visual method as this is a commonly used medium for arts-based research (Bown & Sumsion, 2007). In addition, given the extensive use of photography for documentation in early childhood settings, I reasoned that participants would likely have access to cameras, and could potentially make photographs as part of their work (as ethically appropriate).

Participants were briefed about the production of visual materials via a short presentation at the end of each initial focus group discussion. Participants were provided with a written guide (see Appendix 5), along with examples of visual materials. Of the visual materials produced by participants, one was an original artwork made of mixed media (see Article 4 – Marilyn’s artwork), two contained original photography (see Articles 5 and 6 – Vanessa’s and Lara’s photographs), and seven comprised montages of images (of symbols, signs and photographs) obtained through internet searches (using terms such as ‘exclusion’, as in Article 6).

In Articles 4, 5 and 6, I have used a variety of terms to describe the methods used by participants for generating visual materials. For example, in Part 3 of the thesis (that deals with the methodology and methods used for the research project) I refer to “arts-based approaches”, in Article 3 “arts-informed enquiry” (p. 3), and Article 4 “visual enquiry” (p. 5). In Articles 5 and 6 however, I refer only to the visual materials generated by participants, rather than naming the method of their production. These variances reflect, in part, my conceptual shifts over the course of the research project, in particular, in how I conceptualised visual materials as data and how I analysed this data (which I discuss in detail in the section on analytic strategies, below). In addition, the methods used by participants for generating visual materials did not necessarily exemplify the application of any particular ‘arts-informed’ approach. It seemed more appropriate then, to use the term
‘visual methods’ to describe the way data was produced, and to refer to what was produced by participants as ‘visual materials’.

**Individual interviews**

Interviews enable focused discussion with individual participants about their ways of negotiating complexity. The decision to interview participants individually was made to help offset the effects of any difficulties they might have contributing to the group discussions (a common effect in focus groups) (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). At the same time, as I detail below, I was aware of critiques of the atomising potential of individual interviews (see for example, Sheurich, 1995; Honan, 2014), and post-structural contentions that everything is relational – “nothing ever ‘is’” alone (Mol, 2002, p. 54). The implication of this onto-epistemological assemblage was conceptualising individual participants as always connected to the groups – or assemblages – of which they were (also) part. These might have included the focus group, their workplaces and the sector, families, or groups with whom they had undertaken study, for example.

Interviews were conducted at a time and in a place convenient for participants: three were conducted in meeting spaces within public libraries, two in cafes, two in facilities nearby participants’ workplaces, one by Skype, one by telephone, and one in a meeting room at a Charles Sturt University facility. All interviews were recorded with a small digital recorder, and spoken words were transcribed using the same transcription service that transcribed all focus group discussions. The meetings with each participant resembled conventional interviews, in that they were “purposeful conversations” (Sheurich, 1995, p. 239), for which I prepared material for discussion, and during which participants were invited to discuss their experiences of negotiating complexity. However as Sheurich (1995, p. 244) argues, without researcher reflexivity, ways interviews are conducted, and the treatment of the materials produced, can perpetuate the idea that “reality can be accurately known through careful, comprehensive, systematic study”. To maintain consistency with my rhizo-methodological approaches I therefore mediated my approach to, and conduct within interviews by using Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987, p. 23) ideas of “mental correctives” (details of this approach, and examples of its use are given in Article 3).

One example of this mediating process was that, in recognition of the “…complexity, uniqueness, and indeterminateness of each one-to-one human interaction” (Sheurich, 1995, p. 241), I prepared an individualised ‘lines of enquiry’ document ahead of each interview (see Appendices 6 and 7 for examples), rather than formulating an interview
guide to be used with all participants. To do this, I used the rhizomatic strategy of ‘reading intensively’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987 – described in detail in Article 3) to draw together aspects of the initial focus group discussion that seemed to ‘jump out’ in relation to each particular participant. These aspects might have included, for example, comments by or to the participant, agreements and disagreements, gestures, intense exchanges, looks or more nuanced combinations of these aspects. In Appendix 6 for example, I have shown aspects relating to participant ‘Di’ by using highlighting and bold text, and have noted further possible lines of enquiry in text balloons alongside the relevant text. I then compiled prompts relating to Di from across my reading of the focus group discussion, to draw upon in the subsequent individual interview with her (this list of possible prompts for discussion is given in Appendix 7).

Although it was my readings of focus group materials that often guided conversation, in the same way that Mazzei (2013, p. 736) describes of her mediation of conventional interview practices, my intention was not “to arrive at meaning but to map connectives, to think about how things worked together”. This was especially the case with the visual materials that participants produced (and which I did not usually see) ahead of the interviews. Through the participants’ introduction of their visual materials into the conversation, the (often) researcher-dominated relations of power that can inhere in interviews (Honan, 2014) were somewhat disrupted. In addition, the introduction of the visual materials prompted connections and insights that I could not have produced through my readings of focus group materials alone.

**Analytic strategies**

*Rhizoanalysis and reading intensively*

As mentioned in the rhizomethodology section above, the analytic strategies used with data generated through the research project were drawn from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) idea of the rhizome, and of rhizoanalysis. Rhizoanalysis is not a cohesive, replicable approach to analyzing data. Rather, each rhizoanalysis operationalises Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of the rhizome in unique ways, by connecting up data fragments, and reading what is produced through these assemblages.

A key tactic of rhizoanalysis used in the research project was reading intensively. Article 3 included some indications of how I used this tactic in the project, including ways I endeavoured to work with its challenges. Therefore here, I give more detail on the concept of reading as a tactic of rhizoanalysis. Reading is a term mostly associated with literacy,
and with the interpretation of a written text to establish its meaning (Masny, 2012). As a tactic of rhizoanalysis, “reading is about sense [but] sense is not about interpretation” (Masny, 2012, p. 82). This conceptualisation gestures to Deleuze’s idea of sense as an event – an actualisation of the coming-together of an assemblage of elements, but also, the production of possibilities for what the assemblage of elements might become (Masny, 2012). Accordingly, as an analytic strategy, reading is not an act of interpretation of the meaning of a collection of elements, but an attempt to map some of the possibilities for becoming produced through the combination of those elements.

In this way, readings of data are always contingent, and always open to different ‘sense’ being made. For example, Renold and Mellor (2013, p. 27) used assemblages of fragments of audio and visual recordings, field notes and drawings to explore children’s ways of “doing gender” in early childhood settings. In another example, Pacini Ketchabaw (2013, p. 222) “disrupts and politicizes” transitions in early childhood settings by connecting a video of an art event, concepts with theorists including Deleuze and Guattari and the photographic artwork of Leah Oates. In these examples (as in my own analyses of data), contents are not interpreted for meaning or symbolism, but are connected up with other elements to generate readings of the possibilities produced.

The idea of mapping connections (mentioned above) is an intrinsic part of rhizoanalytic strategies, however as Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of mapping is not the production of a static or replicable “image of the world” (1987, p. 12). Rather, mapping is a process of “experimentation in contact with the real” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 13) via exploring what is produced or made possible when elements are combined. In terms of a research strategy, mapping then, “is not only a task of investigating what there is…but is also concerned with unpacking what might be” (Ringrose & Coleman, 2013, p. 125). The emphasis of rhizoanalytic strategies on making new connections and reading for possibilities therefore accords with the purposes of my research project – to gain insights into ways educators negotiate complexity in early childhood practice, and to generate new ways of supporting and sustaining the early childhood workforce.

Reading visual data

I initially expected to analyse visual materials produced by participants to uncover the ways in which participants made knowledge and meaning through their everyday experiences and encounters (Cole & Knowles, 2008). However, as I began processes of reading intensively (discussed in detail above), I shifted away from conceptualising the visual
materials as representative of the participant’s experiences, and approached the visual materials as elements that could be ‘plugged in’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) to other data, in order to generate readings of what their connection produced. Therefore, the visual materials, the processes of their making, and discussion of the affect they produced (in the interviews and focus group discussions), were all part of the ‘data’ connected with the visual materials, and read as part of data assemblages.

As with other fragments of data, the visual materials were analysed by processes of reading intensively. In Article 6 for example, I have mapped my reading of data produced by and with Lara as collages, as well as offering written readings. The collage on page 135 endeavours to illustrate some of the senses made – that is, the possibilities produced through readings of Lara’s collage. These senses were made by Lara prior to my seeing the original collage, made as we talked about the collage together, and made as I later plugged-in Lara’s collage with affective, vocal and written fragments from the transcripts of her contributions to initial and follow-up focus groups and the interview. In this way, the visual material was read as an assemblage of elements in itself, as well as for what was produced as the collage was connected-up with other elements as part of a data assemblage.

**Subjectivities and data analysis**

From a Deleuzian perspective, processes of data generation can be conceptualised as entangling researchers, participants and data in assemblages of understandings of reality (ontologies), ideas about what knowledge is and how it is produced (epistemologies), and methodological approaches. Barad describes the interrelatedness of these entanglements as onto-epistemological: “practices of knowing in being…because we [researchers] are of the world”, rather than “standing outside the world” (2007, p. 185). For these reasons, I conceptualised my role in data generation as similarly entangled with other elements of the research assemblage. In Article 3, for example, I discuss some of the challenges of these entanglements in relation to participants whom I knew prior to the research project.

I also conceptualised my role in data analysis in a similarly entangled way – as an *assemblage converter* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 358) who connects-up, plugs-in and reads multiple aspects of data generated through the research project. I alone attended all group and individual discussions, and subsequently had access to all transcripts, recordings and visual materials. I also took in visceral prompts – moments of intensity in which capacities for change (*affect*) seemed to be made more or less possible. These occurred, for
example, in “tone, intensity, and rhythm” (Scheurich, 1995, p. 240) of participants’ spoken words, or the veracity or flow of their gestures or facial expressions (Mazzei, 2013). I documented moments of affect such as these on transcriptions of focus group discussions and interviews (see Appendix 8 for an example), and drew on this affective data in my readings. As I discuss in Article 3 for example, I drew on moments of affective intensity to inform my readings of educators’ ways of negotiating complexity. My readings were also informed by participants’ readings. That is, instances in which participants read or made sense of their own experiences in terms of the group discussions and research conversations in which they participated, and of their own and others’ visual materials created as part of the project.

**Research ethics**

The ethical considerations for my project were based upon the principles of integrity, respect for persons and groups, beneficence, and justice, published in Australia’s *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], 2007). Guidelines concerning research with human subjects provided by the CSU Research Office were also consulted. Based on CSU’s human research ethics guidelines, I assessed my research project as having potentially ‘more than minimal risk’ for participants. The basis for this assessment was my intention to approach current CSU students with invitations to participate in the project, via their online subject forum sites. According to guidelines supplied by the CSU Human Research Ethics Committee (2015), particular care needs to be exercised in research contexts when “a dependent relationship between researcher and subject does (or could be argued to) exist”. In particular, they highlight the potential for university staff members’ invitations to participate, being perceived as coercive by students. In order to mediate any such effects, I was not involved in teaching duties during the recruitment and data generation phases of my research project. Moreover, in accordance with guidelines supplied by CSU’s Human Research Ethics Committee, I stipulated in my information statements that participation was purely voluntary and that there were no connections between participation and coursework assessment (see ‘Information for participants’ in Appendix 9).

Another potential risk for participants was the unknown effects of exploring power relations, taken-for-granted discourses, or discourses that had personal resonance or meaning for participants. I acknowledged and addressed these possibilities in the information statements by outlining the limits to personal disclosure required, and gave information about the counselling services available to students of CSU, and by Lifeline (a
free, telephone and online crisis support and suicide prevention service) to other participants. Once these issues were considered, and appropriate materials drafted, the proposal was lodged with, and approved by the CSU Human Research Ethics Committee (certification of their approval appears on page vi) before recruitment commenced.

Once volunteers agreed to participate, information statements (see Appendix 8) were supplied to them by email, and their consent obtained in writing at the initial focus group discussion for each of the two groups. Participants were offered the opportunity to take part in some or all of the phases of the research project as part of the initial information statements for the project (see Appendix 8), and written consent to participate in subsequent phases was sought from and given by participants prior to the commencement of each phase (consent forms for participation in the interview, arts-informed and focus group phases are included as Appendices 10, 11 and 12).

In line with CSU guidelines the information statements provided participants with the opportunity to withdraw from the focus group, or from the project at any time, and without giving a reason, should they wish to do so. In addition, participants could choose to withdraw the visual materials produced as part of the project, or their interview materials, from the body of data. However, due to the conversational nature of focus groups, participants were not offered the opportunity to have their contributions to discussion removed if choosing to withdraw from the project. All participants consented to the conditions of participation, and there were no requests to withdraw contributions to the project. All but one participant took part in all four phases of the project. This participant – ‘Marilyn’ – was unable to attend the follow up focus group. Participants were also advised that the focus group discussions and interviews would be audio-taped and transcribed.

Transcription services were contracted in accordance with CSU’s guidelines on the use of transcribers for confidential interviews and confidentiality agreement. Transcripts of relevant focus group discussions and individual interviews were emailed to all participants for their review, along with a request for any corrections. No requests for corrections or retractions were received from participants.

In addition to these measures for addressing ethical considerations (and in keeping with a rhizomatic approach to the research project), my approach to ethics during the conduct of the project was informed by Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of immanent ethics. This is a way of thinking about ethics as relative and relevant to particular situations or relations, which Deleuze distinguishes from morality, and describes as “a set of constraining rules…that
judge actions and intentions in relation to transcendent values…[such as] good and bad” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 100). In Article 3 (which follows), I discuss this concept further, and give examples of immanent ethics at play during the conduct of the research project.

References


**Article Three**

Challenges of ‘thinking differently’ with rhizoanalytic approaches: a reflexive account

Tamara Cumming*

Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education, Charles Sturt University, Australia

(Received 28 May 2013; accepted 15 January 2014)

Growing numbers of educational researchers are using rhizoanalytic approaches based on the work of Deleuze and Guattari to think differently in their research practices. However, as those engaging in debates about post-qualitative research suggest, thinking differently is not without its challenges. This paper uses three complex challenges encountered in the author’s doctoral research – concerned with the early childhood education workforce – to reflexively explore some of the implications of thinking differently with rhizoanalytic approaches. In particular, the author discusses ways of making correctives to: repetition and thinking differently, ways that subjects are produced as-and-in-assemblages, and, immanent ethics. The paper concludes with some possible implications of these challenges and correctives for research practices, and for debates about post-qualitative research.

Keywords: early childhood education; Deleuze; Gilles; rhizoanalysis

Rhizoanalytic approaches in educational research

Growing numbers of researchers working in the area of education are using rhizoanalytic approaches1 (drawn from Deleuze and Guattari’s [1987] concept rhizome) to ‘think differently’ in their research practices (see, for example, Alvermann 2000; Honan 2004; Pearce and MacLure 2009; Sellers 2009; Mazzei 2010; Done and Knowler 2011). In a Deleuzian sense, the rhizome is characterized by multiple, proliferating connections between diverse modes, such as the ‘… linguistic … perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 8). The rhizome has no pre-determined structure and can be entered at any point. Accordingly, rhizomatic thinking challenges causal or linear views of relationships between acts or ideas that are often represented and stabilized through arborescent logic (tree-like, hierarchical models).

Putting rhizoanalytic approaches to work involves attending to connections and multiplicity, middles and ruptures, and ‘forces that make and unmake territories’ (Livesey 2010, 18). The movements of these forces are interrelated in a rhizome’s movements, as it ‘ceaselessly makes connections’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 8) while always rupturing these and forming new connections. Deleuze and Guattari

*Email: tcumming@csu.edu.au

© 2014 Taylor & Francis
describe these as ‘... movements of deterritorialization ... and processes of reterritorialization’ (8) that stabilize, define, de- and re-stabilize spaces.

For research practices, this focus of rhizoanalytic approaches on movements makes them well suited to enquiry that seeks to generate new possibilities, change, and transformation (Olsson 2009). Accordingly, researchers have noted that rhizoanalytic approaches can: ‘... offer ways to “see” each moment of interaction as many things – both and neither bad nor good’ (Leaflgren 2008, 331, emphasis in original); the opportunity to ‘... play with [ideas] to see what happens, what spaces of possibilities might open’ (Sellers 2009, 91); to ‘connect diverse fragments of data in ways that produced new linkages and revealed discontinuities’ (Alvermann 2000, 118), and to ‘... help us think ... beyond ... already constituted and repeated forms’ (Mazzei 2010, 514).

In addition, researchers involved in debates about post-qualitative research (see in particular, St. Pierre 2011; Jackson and Mazzei 2013) have suggested that working with rhizoanalytic approaches offers opportunities to engage with, and disrupt the sometimes limiting strictures of qualitative research methodologies. They have done this by (for example) working with affect as a method in research (Hickey-Moody 2013), ‘working the limits’ (Jackson and Mazzei 2013, 262) of research practices (such as interviews) by rethinking underpinning assumptions (such as ‘data, voice, and truth’), and by challenging dichotomies separating the human and non-human (St. Pierre 2011). For these researchers, rhizoanalytic approaches allow for a focus on what is produced in the interactions of parts of assemblages, rather than centring on meanings produced by or for participants.

However, the opportunities highlighted above also suggest some of the methodological challenges for researchers wanting to put these concepts to work. For example, rhizoanalysis is characterized by attention to the ‘... changing state of things’ (Massumi 1987, xiii), mapping ever-changing processes of becoming, rather than tracing (and therefore) reproducing ‘... fixed and finished “being[s]”’ (MacNaughton 2005, 121). These mappings of how concepts work, and what they produce will always be circumstantial, and therefore cannot be transposed into a model. As Biddle notes: ‘as a method, this allows for a great deal of flexibility and possibility, but not much in terms of direction or certainty of results’ (2010, 21). Researchers have also shared affective challenges they have encountered in putting rhizoanalytic approaches to work, including ‘disconnection’ when parts of data do not seem to make sense (MacLure 2013, 172), struggling and grappling with messiness (Giungi 2011), and ‘... uncomfortable affects that swarm among our supposedly rational arguments ... ’ (MacLure 2013, 172).

Using these opportunities and challenges of rhizoanalytic approaches as entryways, the purpose of this paper is to map some of the challenges that I myself encountered when thinking differently with rhizoanalytic approaches. In particular, I draw on what Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 23) describe as ‘mental correctives’ ways of moving through structures such as ‘... dualisms [they] had no wish to construct but through which [they] pass’. Correctives are practices of a logic of ‘and’ (St. Pierre 2011, 613) – ways of disrupting familiar dualisms that can disconnect and stabilize assemblages, by defining and organizing according to what is judged to be good or bad, right or wrong, part of or not part of. The purpose of the correctives I discuss in this paper is not then to prescribe a ‘right’ to counter a ‘wrong’ but to share some of the ways that making mental correctives assisted me in continuing to disrupt, rather
than accede to, the pull of familiar research methodologies and procedures, and to make and further connections.

In the following sections, I give a brief account of the doctoral research in which I put rhizoanalytic approaches to work, then give a reflexive account of three of the challenges I encountered - thinking differently without measures of sameness, ways that subjects are produced as-and-in-assemblages, and immanent ethics. Throughout the paper as well as in concluding comments, I suggest implications of these challenges for research practices, and for debates about post-qualitative research (St. Pierre 2011; Jackson and Mazzie 2013).

**Beginning to put rhizoanalytic approaches to work in a doctoral project**

My doctoral research is concerned with the question: how do early childhood educators (i.e. those working directly with children in prior-to-school settings) in Australia negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice? It involves 10 educators with experience in long day-care, in-home care and mobile children’s services (such as playgroups). Educators participated in an initial and follow-up focus group, and between these group discussions, undertook individual arts-informed enquiry and an interview with me, that drew upon the visual materials they had produced.

My interest in ways that educators negotiated discourses and subjectivities was initially framed by a Foucauldian-derived concern for the operation of relations of power (see Cumming, Sumsion and Wong 2013). However, I moved to use a rhizoanalytic approach in my project to help me ask different questions of data (Jackson and Mazzie 2013), and open space for different possibilities (Sellers 2009) than those already pursued by researchers concerned with the early childhood workforce. I first approached rhizoanalysis by trying to figure out how to ‘do’ it from other researchers’ accounts (such as Honan 2004, 2010). Working with transcripts of recordings of my engagement with participants, I generated a map of ways that educators were negotiating discourses and subjectivities (movements such as: ‘holding on’, ‘letting go’, ‘playing it safe’, ‘bending’, and ‘balancing’) that resonated (MacLure 2010) with my research question. Yet, my attempts to write about these movements stalled - I seemed limited to saying that the movements were examples of educators’ experiences of negotiating, and nothing more.

Although I understood that each rhizoanalysis would be unique, I had the sense that there was some key principle that I had missed. I reconsidered my approach and realized that, in setting out to produce something ‘Deleuzian’ (Honan 2004, 268), I had inadvertently fallen back on my social scientific research methods training and had transposed methodological and analytic procedures that were familiar to me. They were, notably, looking for themes throughout and across a data-set (Braun and Clarke 2006) and trying to render everything in the data-set ‘explicable’ (MacLure 2013, 169). In identifying examples of ways of negotiating, and ordering them according to types of movements, I had simplified the ‘... proliferated surface of life’ by: ‘... cutting its flows into ‘limited and measured things’, and ‘hanging them in bunches under their ruling ideas’ (169). When one of my supervisors asked me: ‘lots of qualitative research paradigms would say that they are about thinking differently from conventional ways of doing research. What claim does rhizoanalysis have for saying it is about thinking differently?’ I began to see that putting rhizoanalysis to work in my research practices would require more than learning to do differently. It
would also require me to consider my conceptualizations of ‘thinking’ and ‘differently’. Therefore, the first challenge that I discuss below is concerned with conceptualizations of difference and implications of the concept of difference-in-itself for assessing the quality of rhizoanalytic approaches.

**Challenges in thinking differently with rhizoanalysis**

**Difference without ‘measures of sameness’**

In a Deleuzian sense, difference is not ‘difference from the same’ or ‘difference of the same over time’; rather, it is ‘difference-in-itself’ – the ‘uniqueness implicit in the particularity of things and the moments of their conception and perception’ (Stagoll 2010b, 74–75). Rather than being distinguished by a ‘... relative measure of sameness’ (Stagoll 2010b, 74) – i.e. according to similarities-and-differences-from other methodologies – each rhizoanalytic approach is a unique ‘articulation’ (Dimitriadis and Kambreris 1997, 150) of Deleuze and Guattari’s characteristics of the rhizome, expressed within particular circumstances.

Although this conceptualization of difference (in-itself) explains why each rhizoanalysis is unique, I wondered how (without reference to some ‘measure of sameness’; Stagoll 2010b, 74) the quality or rigour of rhizoanalyses might be judged as a research practice. Especially as standards of research quality, such as transferability, credibility, or dependability (Mertens 2005), are irrelevant to rhizoanalytic mappings of how things work, and what they produce.

St. Pierre (2011, 620) proposes an idea of rigour, in which at first, I read possibilities for assessing the quality of my own rhizoanalytic approaches. She suggests that rigour is: ‘... the demanding work of freeing oneself from the constraints of existing structures ... so that one can think the unthought’. Rigour is the work of différence, not repetition ... ’ Perhaps then, the more ‘freedom’ from ‘constraints of existing structures’ (instructions and codified ways to do things) that I could demonstrate in my rhizoanalyses, the more quality they would have? However, St. Pierre’s comments about the importance of resisting the stultifying, yet ‘almost insurmountable ... urge to create new structures of comfort... ’ (2011, 622) suggest that appropriating her idea of rigour as a definition to be followed, might well create a ‘new structure of comfort’.

This comfort might come at the cost of the transformative possibilities of the unthought, offered by rhizoanalytic approaches. Yet, with some discomfort, I recognized that I found ‘existing structures’ (such as familiar research methodologies and procedures) seductive. The apparent ‘constraints’ seemed a safe haven of models and methods to trace (repetition), in the face of the unknown, disconcerting and disruptive spaces (the différence) of rhizoanalytic approaches.

As Stagoll (2010b, 75) notes, ‘destabilizing our thinking [and] disrupting our faculties’ and to ‘do so routinely, is not easy’. As I negotiated these discursive pullbacks towards the familiar, I recognized that I could not bracket-out the circumstances with which I had come to rhizoanalytic approaches. Nor would ‘freeing [my]self from the constraints of existing structures’ (St. Pierre 2011, 620) be a single movement with which I would suddenly be able to master the doing of rhizoanalysis. Freeing myself would be an ongoing process of movements of (what I refer to as) becoming-free, as I negotiated forces such as discourses of established methodologies, that threatened to stabilize rhizoanalytic approaches into a methodology, or some other ‘structure of comfort’.
In the following sections, I discuss some of the ways that I used correctives as practices of the logic of ‘and’ (St. Pierre 2011, 613) to disrupt territorializing effects of dualisms and familiar ways of doing and being. In particular, I will focus on the concept of reading research assemblages and replacing questions with which I seek to know or understand what something ‘is’, with enquiry into how something works and what it produces. I begin by reorienting my concern for ‘how do I do rhizoanalysis?’ to consider ‘how does rhizoanalysis work?’

How do rhizoanalytic approaches work?

According to Deleuze and Guattari, ‘the only question is how anything works, with its intensities, flows, processes, partial objects – none of which mean anything’ (1995, 21, emphasis in original). This statement draws attention to the intent of rhizoanalytic approaches to give readings of experiences in assemblages, not to analyse meanings that ostensibly reside within texts. In a Deleuzian sense, assemblages are ‘… processes of arranging, organising, and fitting together’ (Livesey 2010, 18) in which ‘there is no longer a tri-partite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 25). Further, assemblages constantly shift, through movements that stabilize, de- and re-stabilize spaces. Accordingly, it would be inappropriate to explain, understand, or interpret what an assemblage is or what it means as if it were static and knowable (Jackson and Mazzei 2013). How then, do readings work?

Masny (2012a) suggests that

Reading is an event that involves a relationship between bodies (a text, a child, a brain, a time of day, etc.) within an assemblage of life. The machinic assemblage of life produces sense, that is, not what a text is or means, but how it might become (83) … [it] extends the power to read differently and to think differently, to go beyond what is to what could be. (78)

In this figuration of reading as an event within an assemblage of life, data are always and within assemblages, including research assemblages, that work as a machine ‘… mak[ing] … connections between different elements within a particular grouping’ (Coleman and Ringrose 2013, 17). Further, research assemblages include words, gestures, tones of voice, choices, images, theories of reality and knowledge that inform all these things, life circumstances, myself, the participants, and … and … and … and … All of these elements are open then, to readings that are ‘… affective and multiple … as opposed to correct’ (Done and Knowler 2011, 843). Masny also discusses ‘… reading in interested ways (foregrounding certain thoughts and experiences that disrupt)’ (2012a, 78) and this reminds me of Deleuze’s proposition that in reading ‘… intensive[ly] … something comes through or it doesn’t. There’s nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging in to an electric circuit …’ (Deleuze 1995, 8). However, how will I know when something is coming through? What type of somethings might these be? What do these somethings produce?

Coming through

The concept of something coming through reading intensively and recalling experiences (that my supervisors and myself had shared), of things ‘jumping out at’ or ‘grabbing’ us. MacLure (2010, 282) describes these events as ‘resonating in the body as well
as the brain’. These ‘visceral prompts’ (Hickey-Moody 2013, 79) are moments of affect: ‘... additive processes, forces, powers, and expressions of change... that produce a modification or transformation in the affected body’ (Colman 2005, 11). As a corrective, I began to consciously tune-in to affective intensities in my readings with(in) assemblages – turning up the volume of resonances that came through, and turning down the volume of interpretative analyses and familiar research procedures. For example, after reading Maclure’s (2010, 282) comments about the place of ‘silliness’ in rhizoanalytic approaches, I stopped discounting somethings like a transcriber’s note of ‘all laughing’, or ‘talking over each other’ or ‘more than one conversation at once’. Instead, I read what(ever) ‘came through’ – moments of connection and change (Coleman and Ringrose 2013, 17) for participants – to get a sense of what might be produced through these connections. In this way, putting to work a rhizoanalytic approach allowed me to disrupt constraints on how, or what, to ‘read’ in a transcript and to focus on the unique moments of difference-in-itself.

What did the somethings produce?

The following fragment from one of the four focus groups I conducted works as an example of reading intensively. In this part of the focus group discussion, we were discussing two of the participants’ experiences of ‘getting into trouble’ and receiving formal ‘warnings’ in their workplaces (As in all fragments throughout the paper, P is a participant and R is myself. In the following case only, R1 is another facilitator and I am R2):

R1: SO what are these things called warnings, what are-? / R2: What messages ...
P1: What are they?
R1: Yeah, what’s a warning?
P2: It’s a threat really.
P3: Yeah, it’s a threat that if you don’t pull your head in-
R1: A threat to what?
P3/P2: Do as you’re told/To your job/Your professionalism/Yep, do as you’re told.

As I have tried to convey in the last line of this exchange, participants’ rapid-fire responses to the question ‘a threat to what?’ tumbled over each other and were laden with palpable tension and fear. Resonant with Deleuze’s observation (1995, 24) that ‘speed is to be caught in a becoming’, I read the assemblage of tension/fear/intensity as an ‘embodied connection [with] other people, things and thoughts’ (Maclure 2013, 172) via the concepts warnings and threats. It seemed that within this research assemblage warnings and threats had produced an affective ‘continuous present’ in which two participants connected with a past that was at once ‘... forever changing and... influence[ing] future events’ (Done and Knowler 2011, 850). This example also prompts thoughts about an area that I only have space here to gesture towards – the machinic potential of focus groups. I wondered, what other new thoughts and questions might be produced through reading focus groups as assemblages, rather than interpreting the utterances of individual participants.

Asking different questions

Looking back at this exchange about ‘getting into trouble’, I also wondered what would have been produced if we had asked participants ‘what does a threat do?’ rather than
‘what is a warning?’ or ‘what is it a threat to?’ How could I ask questions that were not ‘... already worked out on the basis of the answers assumed to be probable according to the dominant meanings’ (Deleuze 2002, 15)? Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s concern with how something works, I reoriented questions (such as the following fragment from an interview with a participant) to seek movement, rather than an answer:

R: I remember you saying that you had the people who work with you in the mobile service, you had them doing reflective journals?

P: Yes [at this point, I considered asking ‘why do you think reflection is important?’ but held this back and asked instead ... ]

R: What do you think reflection does?

P: I think – one of my workers I don’t think it does absolutely anything to ... no matter how many ways I put it around I can’t seem to get her to think that sometimes you do something different, especially if things aren’t working. The reflection helps with that way, and sometimes it helps with knowing what’s right. What worked – let’s try that somewhere else.

Asking the question ‘why do you think reflection is important?’ might have given the participant an opportunity to share a range of reasons with me. By asking ‘what do you think reflection does?’ however, my sense is that the participant plugged into her experiences of reflection and how it worked in her own becomings. I also felt that asking about what reflection does, disrupted the potential for a question that implied that there was a body of knowledge (about reflection in this case) to be known, and that the participant’s answer should draw upon.

The assemblage and ‘I’

St. Pierre (2011, 619) argues that working with post structuralist paradigms requires that we think of ourselves ‘... entangled with everyone, everything else – ... as assemblage ... ’, rather than thinking of ourselves as ‘I’. Yet, as she herself concedes ‘it is indeed difficult to escape the “I”’ (619). This observation resonated for me (constituting another challenge to thinking differently), as I considered how ‘I’, and the participants, were produced in the research assemblages of my project. For example, when (as in the fragment above) I asked ‘what do you think reflection does?’ rather than ‘why do you think reflection is important?’ I experienced a decentring of ‘me’ within the assemblage. ‘I’ faded into the background, and it became the ‘machinic assemblage of [the participant’s] life [that] produced sense ... of becomings’ (Masny 2012a, 83), not my interpretations of what the participant thought was important about reflection.

What then, was I doing in the assemblage?

Masny’s explanation of the subject in assemblage provided further illumination:

The subject is an assemblage and part of an assemblage, a multiplicity, the convergence of social, cultural and educational environments, for instance, at a particular moment in time and space ... the subject is part of an assemblage. He or she does not act in isolation. The subject acts in relation to environments, human and non-human. (2012b, 99)

Individuals are not then erased within assemblages, rather they are decentred as subjects, their individuality momentary and always in relation to other elements of assemblages. Therefore, neither I, nor participants in my project, were something that is, we were, and are, becomings.
Immanent ethics

Thinking about my own and participants’ becomings as-and-in-assemblages brought on questions relating to ethics and rhizoanalytic approaches. Deleuze distinguishes ethics (‘assess[ing] what we do, [and] what we say, in relation to the ways of existing involved’) from morality (a set of constraining rules … that judge actions and intentions in relation to transcendent values … [such as] good and bad’) (1995, 100). Ethics are ‘immanent’ to particular relations, and to the ways ‘relations with other bodies diminish or enhance’ a body’s capacity (Coleman and Ringrose 2013, 11). In relation to my own project, I wondered then, that if, as St. Pierre (2001, 142) contends ‘… different theories of the subject make possible different lives’, what were the ethics of choosing theories that conceptualized participants as always in assemblage (not as individuated participants), when these might differ from those that participants might use to conceptualize themselves? Would I be ‘diminishing’ their capacity by imposing my reading of subjectification? Making a corrective with the logic of ‘and’, I saw that as a decentred subject (-as-and-in-assemblage) – I was reading subjectification in a particular way, and my reading of subjectification was not more or less plausible (Honan 2004) than participants’ own theories of themselves. By making this corrective, multiple theories of the subject could circulate in the research assemblages of my project, potentially ‘enhancing’ (Coleman and Ringrose 2013) the capacities of bodies in the assemblage as well as the productive capacity of the assemblage itself.

These concerns with immanent ethics also had particular resonance for research relations with three of the 10 participants in my study. As I had ongoing relationships through my children’s early childhood centre with these participants, I recognized that our belonging and becoming in multiple assemblages would likely be affected. Yet, I was unsure what effects these relations would produce and was unprepared for some of the effects that ensued. During a discussion about the positioning of parents as clients of early childhood services, one participant noted, for example:

I am, I feel for [my child’s name] that I’m like the great aunt … and you’re part of my extended family – you’re not quite young enough to be my daughter, but you know, you’re an extension of my family, so when I think of my own family I think of the [early childhood centre’s] clientele as like being part of my extended family as such. You’re important, like, you as a person are important to me.

These movements between assemblages of the early childhood centre, its’ ‘clientele’, the concept of ‘clients’ of early childhood centres, concepts of ‘family’, and the participants’ subjectification of me as ‘extended family’ in her schema, took me by surprise. They disrupted a carefully wrought researcher subjectivity and authority that I barely realized that I had created. I felt very moved by these comments, yet unsettled and a little embarrassed as well. As the group discussion progressed and I had time to ‘collect myself’, I saw these (and other) de-territorializing movements as reminders to de-centre myself and as invitations from participants to connect as an element in the assemblage, rather than holding the research assemblage at a distance.

I experimented with this idea in an interview with another participant, practising becoming-with her in the research assemblage by showing, rather than hiding, my uncertainty:
R: Yes, so I'll be in touch again, about getting together again. For our follow up.
P: 'Follow up', so what's that to look at? Where you've gone with the-
R: Yeah I think so. Part of this, the thingy for me is, sometimes I feel like I don't really
know what I'm doing. I've kind of got the structure of the research design, but in terms of — because of the theoretical stuff I'm using, yeah it makes it tricky. It makes it
uncomfortable for me.

An unexpected consequence of making this admission was that I wondered about what
my ‘uncomfortability’ might be producing. As I read the transcript of the interview
later, I realized that it was in the space between my research design and the ‘theoretical
stuff’ (i.e. Deleuze) that I was uncomfortable. This affect prompted me to consider
what potential for change the discomfort might be gesturing to, in relation to my
research design and theoretical orientation. I considered whether the ‘concepts fit
together or not’ Coleman and Ringrose (2013, 13), how to reconcile the emphasis
on movement in rhizoanalytic approaches, with a research design and research ques-
tions conceptualized in more limited (and limiting) ways. I thought about the machinic
nature of assemblages — their productiveness — and this connected to my interest in
movements and lines that underpins my research question: ‘How do early childhood
educators in Australia negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing early child-
hood practice?’

Although I could not redesign my research project at this point, I considered how I
might rethink the research question itself, in light of the theory of the subject that I was
working with. When originally asking the research question above, I see that I had indi-
viduated educators and strategies (i.e. movements) in mind. However, by working from
the concept of assemblages and de-centred subjects, and attention to Deleuze’s con-
cerns with how things work and what they produce, I saw that rather than (only)
looking for strategies conceived of and implemented by individuals, I could look at
ways that parts of assemblages relate. As Jackson and Mazzei (2013, 269) note: ‘... what
matters more than certainty, accuracy, and authenticity are the relations, affects, and
machinic potential to interrupt and transform other machines’. Perhaps I could re-
pose the question as ‘How do early childhood educators in Australia produce prac-
tice assemblages?’ and/or ‘how do early childhood practice assemblages produce early
childhood educators in Australia?’ Rethinking my question along these lines could shift
the focus from individuated educators to the complexity of early childhood practice
assemblages, and also open possibilities for considering how non-human as well as
human elements of assemblages might be productive.

**Concluding comments — implications for research practices and debates about
‘post qualitative research’ debate**

Rhizomatic movements disrupt territories that demarcate what is known and familiar,
making connections that themselves rupture and move to establish new and productive
pathways. This process carries on in a ‘relay of intensities’ (Deleuze and Guattari
1987, 11), pushing to open new spaces and enclosing others. In the same way,
making correctives (such as discussed in this paper) as practices of a logic of ‘and’
helped me to disrupt the familiar, to open new spaces, new questions, new knowledges,
and new ways of producing knowledges (St. Pierre 2011). As I have also suggested,
correctives reminded me that the doing of rhizoanalysis is an ongoing negotiation of
becoming-free, not a singular movement in which (for example) the compelling and
paralysing pull of established qualitative research methodologies, and my history with them, can be overcome.

This reflexive account of some of the challenges I have encountered in putting rhizoanalytic approaches to work raises a number of other questions that connected to current discussions about post-qualitative research. For example, discussions about affect as method (Hickey-Moody 2013) and the inclusion as data of elements of assemblages such as ‘affect, feeling and sensation’ (Done and Knowler 2011, 848) that researchers and participants experience, yet can find it hard to account for in established research approaches. As the brief rhizoanalytic forays included in this paper gesture towards, putting rhizoanalytic approaches to work allows for recognition of bodily sensations (affects) as ways of ‘knowing and relating’ (Coleman and Ringrose 2013, 4) between elements of assemblages. This brings on questions of how the physicality of rhizoanalytic approaches works, and what it produces for participants as well as researchers. As my example relating to warnings and threats also suggests that a challenge remains in conveying readings of affect in writing, when these are based upon embodied experiences.

Even while I acknowledge the ways that correctives (such as those I have discussed in this paper) are part of rhizoanalytic ‘rigour’, the ongoing relays of becoming-free from ‘constraints of existing structures’ (St. Pierre 2011, 620), I struggle with how, or indeed, whether, the quality of rhizoanalytic approaches can be judged. I consider my own disconcertions as I struggle to think differently with rhizoanalytic approaches. Rather than squashing disconcertion or dismissing it as not part of research practices, I consider what might disconcertion be doing? What might it produce? Tuning-in to disconcertion keeps me with(in) the research assemblage and disrupts any ‘interpretive mastery’ (MacLure 2013, 168) that I might begin to entertain. It also reminds me that I have chosen research practices in which ‘uncertainty, ambivalence, and messiness’ (Done and Knowler 2011, 844) can be productive of something as yet unthought, if I can embrace its possibilities rather than taking refuge in the comforts of ‘measures of sameness’ (Stagoll 2010b, 74).

Acknowledgements
I gratefully acknowledge and thank Professor Jennifer Sumsion and Dr Sandie Wong for the conversations and thinking that informed this paper. Their and Tina Stratigos’ comments and feedback in the preparation of this paper are also greatly appreciated.

Notes
1. I have used the term rhizoanalytic approaches to take account of diverse ways that researchers describe their particular rhizoanalyses — Honan (2004) for example describes rhizotextual analyses, and Sellers (2009) rhizopoiesis.
2. Jackson and Mazzei (2013, 264) describe ‘becoming’ as a ‘threshold’ state — the space between where we have been, and where we may go. While becoming is ‘between’, there is no pre-determined point towards which it progresses, it is defined by its dynamism (Stagoll 2010a, 26).
3. Reflective practices have been criticised for preferrencing an ‘intensive introspective person- alism’ over an acknowledgment of the ways that experience is mutually affecting (see Done and Knowler 2011, 842). In this paper, I have attempted to use reflexivity as a means to continue becoming-decentred as a subject in assemblages, by considering how things (including myself) work, and what we produce.
4. ‘A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set’ (Braun and Clarke 2006, 82).

References


Postscript to Article 3

In Article 3, I discussed specifics of thinking and doing differently with rhizoanalytic approaches, and gestured to the complexity of assessing the worthiness of research using these approaches. As a postscript to Article 3, and partly as a precursor to the data readings that follow in Part 4, I will expand on two ways the worthiness of my readings might be assessed. The first of these is plausibility, which may be thought of as credibility, or, trustworthiness (Tracy, 2010). A rhizoanalytic reading might be assessed as plausible for example, if a reader can make sense of its propositions (Honan, 2010). However, the sense that is made cannot be assessed as ‘credible’ according to an external standard or measure. Rather, because the sense that is made by each reader will be different, the sense that is made is intensely context-sensitive (Lather, 1993).

A second and related way in which the worthiness of rhizoanalytic readings might be assessed, is through their ontological commensurability (Dufresne & Masny, 2005) – the use of concepts in ways that demonstrate a consistent worldview. Attention to ontological commensurability can be seen in this thesis in the ways the underpinning ontology of Deleuze and Guattari’s work is consistently put to work. As discussed in Article 3 for example, asking questions of participants in ways that might generate that which is not already known or implied (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) might be said to have ontological commensurability.

In terms of the thesis therefore, Article 3 makes visible the processes through which I analysed data, and the ways I have worked with theory to generate readings that are plausible and commensurate with Deleuze and Guattari’s ontologies. The next part of the thesis includes three articles in which readings of data are put to work to explore educators’ experiences of complexity in early childhood practice.

References


Part Four:

Readings of data
Article Four

Early childhood practice and refrains of complexity

Tamara Cumming*, Jennifer Sumson and Sandie Wong

Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education (RIPE), Research House, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia

(Received 25 February 2014; accepted 19 June 2014)

Early childhood practice has often been described as complex in both policy documents and research literature; however, less attention has been given to exploring the nature and consequences of complexity in early childhood practice. At a time of intense policy attention in many national contexts, there is the potential for closing down, as well as for opening up conceptualisations of early childhood practice. To help keep possibilities open for multiple conceptualisations of practice, in this paper, we explore how complexity works and what it produces in early childhood practice assemblages. To do this, we draw on data fragments from research with 10 early childhood educators in NSW, Australia, and read these data with concepts from Deleuze and Guattari. We suggest four ways that our readings help articulate, and contribute to understandings of the complexity of early childhood practice.

Keywords: early childhood education; early childhood educators; post-structural theory; Australia

Introduction

The complexity of early childhood practice is a familiar refrain across many early childhood policy documents and much of the research literature. However, the nature and consequences of this complexity often remain under-examined, perhaps because making sense of this complexity presents ongoing conceptual, methodological and representational challenges. Examining complexity in early childhood practice is particularly important at a time when, in many national contexts, early childhood education is the focus of intensified policy attention. For, as Dahlberg and Moss (2005) point out, with intensified policy attention can come the potential for closing down, as well as for opening up, conceptualisations of early childhood practice.

Our purpose in this paper is to help articulate, and contribute to conceptual understandings of, the complexity of early childhood practice. We do this by framing the paper around the notion of the complexity of early childhood practice as a refrain — initially in an everyday sense of the term as a recurring utterance or theme, and then by taking up Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of the refrain (discussed in detail later). We then illustrate ways that these concepts of refrain are at work, with reference to the Australian early childhood education context, where an intensive period of reform is underway. Accordingly, we explore some relevant

*Corresponding author. Email: tcumming@csu.edu.au

© 2014 TACTYC
Australian policy documents where the complexity of early childhood practice is acknowledged in different ways, as well as some instances of the refrain in a range of early childhood research literature. We then draw on empirical data from an investigation of how early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing practice in Australian contexts (Cumming, Sumson, and Wong 2013). We read data fragments from this study through a Deleuze-Guattarian lens, to explore how complexity in early childhood practice works, and what is produced through complexity. By taking this approach to analysing empirical data, we hope to address some of the conceptual and methodological challenges of making sense of complexity. Finally, we reflect on how thinking differently about the refrain of the complexity of early childhood practice might contribute to keeping possibilities open for multiple conceptualisations of educators’ practice.

Refrains of the complexity of early childhood practice – in Australian policy documents

The complexity of early childhood practice is a familiar refrain in policy documents in Australia, where the implementation of an extensive early childhood education reform agenda is underway. This agenda is creating the very type of intensified policy space that Dahlberg and Moss (2005) draw attention to as having the potential for closing down, as well as for opening up, conceptualisations of early childhood practice. These possibilities are evident in key policy documents relating to the early childhood workforce, where quite different refrains of the complexity of early childhood practice are at work. For example, Australia’s Early Childhood Workforce Strategy states that there is ‘… increasing recognition that the work of caring for and educating young children is complex’ (SCSEE 2012–16, 3), however, there is no elaboration of this complexity.

The Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF] (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2009) – Australia’s first national early childhood curriculum guide – contains a more nuanced idea of the complexity of early childhood practice. In the EYLF, early childhood practice is represented as a holistic endeavour that uses relational, curricular, teaching and learning features working together to support children’s learning. In the EYLF (2009, 11), educators are represented as having an ‘active role in facilitating children’s learning’, by weaving together capacities, including professional judgement, decision-making, intuition and improvisation, and drawing upon ‘a range of perspectives and theories’. In contrast to the (unelaborated) refrain of complexity in the Early Years Workforce Strategy then, the refrain of the complexity of early childhood practice in the Early Years Learning Framework is evident in the multiple features of early childhood practice that it identifies.

Refrains of the complexity of early childhood practice – in early childhood research literature

Research literature concerned with early childhood practice also contains refrains of complexity, for example, in relation to and stemming from: policy landscapes in Australia (Sumson 2003; O’Gorman and Hard 2013) and internationally (Ackerman 2005; Urban 2008); the increasing demands of working with families’ and children’s diverse cultures and needs (Urban 2008); notions of professionalism (Osgood 2009;
Krieg 2010) and peer interactions (O’Gorman and Hard 2013). Other examples in
this literature have focused on how complexities are, or might be, negotiated in prac-
tice, for example, improvisation (Lobman 2006); early childhood educators engaging
in ‘multidimensional thought’ (Raban, Ure, and Waniganayake 2003, 68), and edu-
cators using ‘discursive resources’ (Sumson 2003, 81) to see multiple possibilities
for themselves and for early childhood practice.

While facets of complexity in early childhood practice (such as those mentioned
above) are explored across research literature, there is relatively little focus on com-
plexity as a concept, or on what might be produced through complexity. However,
some researchers – including Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010), Olsson (2009) and
Pacini-Ketchabaw (2013) – have been using post-structural and post-humanist per-
spectives in ways that gesture to theoretical and methodological possibilities for
exploring complexity in new ways. In this paper, we pursue some of these possibili-
ties via analytic strategies and readings of data fragments from a research study, in
order to expand understandings of complexity, and to articulate complexity in new
ways.

In the next section of the paper, we outline some of the theoretical resources
from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) that are put to work in the paper – in particular,
their ideas about assemblies, decentred subjects and the refrain. We then turn to a
description of the research study informing this paper, along with details relating to
participants. This is followed by an outline of the methodology, procedures and ana-
lytic strategies used. Readings of data from the study are then discussed in two
parts. In the first part, data fragments are drawn on to illustrate complexity at work
in educators’ practice, and the subjectivities produced through their ways of negoti-
ating these complexities. In the second part, data fragments are used to illustrate the
collective capacity of assemblies for producing change. The paper concludes with
a four-part discussion of the implications of the readings of the data fragments for
understanding more about the complexity of early childhood practice.

Key ideas informing the paper

Assemblages

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) think about assemblages as arrangements of elements
(such as humans, materials, other-than-human beings, places, sensations, discourses
and time) that come together for particular functions. These functions give assem-
blages a shape (or territory), as the combination of elements momentarily stabilises.
Through their collective capacity, assemblages can produce change beyond what
any one element could produce alone. Assemblages are always open to de-and re-
stabilising movements, as elements combine and recombine in unique ways, moving
things forward in endless processes of becoming.

Subjects

Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise human subjects as elements in assemblages, as
well as assemblages themselves. Masny (2012, 99, emphasis added) puts it this way:

*The subject is an assemblage and part of an assemblage*, a multiplicity, the conver-
gence of social, cultural and educational environments, for instance, at a particular
moment in time and space ... the subject is part of an assemblage. *He or she does not act in isolation. The subject acts in relation to environments, human and non-human.*

According to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) way of thinking about assemblages then, relations of human and other-than-human elements are undetermined in assemblages. Human subjects are *decentered* — that is, they are part of processes of becoming, but not necessarily the catalyst for change themselves. In relation to early childhood education then, and as we (Cumming and Sumson, Forthcoming) have contended elsewhere, it is through stabilising, de- and re-stabilising combinations – assemblages – of people, places, sensations, materials and so on, that change can be produced. As we are especially interested in educators as part of the refrain of the complexity of early childhood practice, we focus on ways that educators ‘act in relation to’ (Masny 2012, 99), and with other elements in *early childhood practice assemblages.*

**The refrain**

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking, Bogue (1999, 126) describes refrains as ‘a rhythmic regularity that brings order out of chaos’. The refrain does this by acting on ‘that which surrounds it’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 384), while also drawing elements in and combining them in organised ways – crystallising sometimes disparate or unrelated elements. Although the crystallising and de- and re-stabilising movements of refrains recur (though not necessarily in any regular way), what is crystallised and produced will be different in every case. The refrain also acts as a vector for movements that ‘transform [assemblages] from within’ (385) – so they are implicated in the breaking down and rebuilding of connections and combinations with other elements, across assemblages.

So far in this paper, we have described a refrain of the complexity of early childhood practice that moves across policy documents and research literature. We now add to this conceptualisation the idea that early childhood practice also works as a refrain – moving across assemblages and giving a recurring and recognisable shape to what educators and children are involved in, within early childhood settings. At the same time, early childhood practice refrains draw and act on the particular surroundings of each assemblage, crystallising elements in momentary combinations that produce change. Conceptualising early childhood practice as a refrain allows for different questions to become possible. In particular, moving from a focus on individual elements of the refrain of complexity in existing policy and research literature, to exploring how elements combine, transform, break down and rebuild, and what these processes produce across practice assemblages. Hereafter, we put these understandings of the refrain to work in reading data fragments from the research study that informed this paper. Before doing that however, we give details of the research study, participants in the research study, and analytic strategies used.

**Details of the research study**

**The study**

As previously noted, the data discussed in this paper come from a study that set out to explore ways that early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing practice. Interest in exploring this question was prompted by existing
research concerned with ways that early childhood practice was informed by discourses shaping expected and preferred ways of ‘being’ an educator, along with strategies that educators used to negotiate these sometimes competing messages (see Cumming, Summison, and Wong 2013 for further details). Among the aims of the research study that informs this paper were: identifying some of the ways that educators negotiated tensions between multiple discourses informing early childhood practice, and contributing to understandings of the complexities of early childhood practice.

The study was approved by the Human Ethics Committee of Charles Sturt University. Prior to taking part, participants received information about the study and freely gave their consent to participate. Although the research design did not include the opportunity for participants to give feedback on analysis prior to submission of this manuscript, they were provided with transcripts of the focus group discussions and interview for any changes to be made. Information provided to the participants about the study included meanings of the term ‘discourses’ that underpinned the study, the sorts of questions that might be used in the focus group discussion and, an example from Tamara Cumming’s own experiences of negotiating mixed messages in early childhood practice. Ways of working with similar ‘mixed messages’ (that is, contradictory ideas about ways of doing and being in early childhood settings) were the starting point for the initial focus group discussions.

The methods used to explore the aims of the study included initial and follow-up focus group discussions, visual enquiry and individual research conversations with each participant. The individual research conversations were loosely structured, and some of the ideas that had been generated in the focus group discussions were explored in more depth. Participants were also asked, in response to the ideas generated in focus group discussions, to select or create a visual artefact that documented ways they negotiated mixed messages. Some of these visual materials included montages of existing photographs, new photography and mixed-media artwork. These artefacts were used to prompt the research conversations and the follow-up focus group discussions. Along with the visual materials, the follow-up discussions were based on analysis of the initial group discussions and research conversations.

Participants

All participants in the research study were living in the state of New South Wales, Australia, with seven located in Sydney and three in regional centres. Six participants were working in long day care centres, one in a preschool, one in mobile children’s services, one in in-home care and one had left the prior-to-school sector to pursue studies in teaching English as a second language. All were women, aged from early 20s to mid-50s. Participants are identified by pseudonyms in the data fragments used in this paper. Some information about their experience, qualifications or life background has been included where relevant, to provide additional context and connection between the data fragments and discussion.

Analytic strategies

Transcripts of the focus group discussions, research conversations and copies of the visual materials were read for their resonance – that is, for parts of the data that seemed to jump out of the transcript or that seemed to ‘glow’ (MacLure 2006, 229).
For example, the data fragments included in this paper came through (Deleuze 1995) via ‘visceral prompts’ (Hickey-Moody 2013, 79), such as a participant’s repetition of words, interjections or assenting sounds from the focus group, or emphatic hand gestures during a research conversation. Identifying material to work with by attending to such affective alerts might be considered highly selective and subjective. However, attending to these cues is in keeping with what Deleuze (1995, 8) describes as processes of ‘reading intensively’, in which: ‘there’s nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging in to an electric circuit’. Part of this strategy is connecting-up data fragments, and reading what comes from these connections, rather than attempting to describe large parts (or all) of the data via abstract categories (for more detail, see Cumming 2014). These analytic strategies – attending to affective alerts and reading intensively – are consistent with Deleuze and Guattari’s anti-representational stance and with considerations raised by other education-related researchers putting Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking to work (such as MacLure 2006; Hickey-Moody 2013).

The researcher’s subjectivities are intertwined in these processes of ‘reading intensively’. In the case of this research, processes of selection involved Tamara not only reading transcripts of what was said, but also reading and re-reading visceral prompts from having been with participants as the data were generated. As the one person with access to what was said and done in all group research discussions and conversations, Tamara acted as what Deleuze and Guattari describe as an ‘assemblage converter’ (1987, 358) – a key part of the movement from one assemblage to another – connecting-up multiple aspects of the texts produced as data by the assemblages of participants, facilitator and researcher, and part of the production of new assemblages. In this way, reading intensively is a way of being open to multiple aspects of texts and of orienting to the possibilities produced in readings of texts, rather than towards representing what participants, or a particular text means (Jackson and Mazzei 2013).

In line with these analytic strategies, parts of the fragments included below have been highlighted in bold, to indicate to readers the particular intensity these parts hold for us.

Reading complexity in the data fragments
The following discussion is in two parts. The first part deals with complexity at work in early childhood practice assemblages and ways that educators negotiate elements involved in shaping these assemblages – including discourses and subjectivities. The second part focuses on the collective capacity of assemblages for producing change.

Part one
Discursive complexity at work
In the following fragment, Marilyn (a university-qualified educator with over 30 years of experience who had recently taken on the role of centre director), talked about ways that she negotiates conflicts with staff by always reorienting to ‘the child’:
Marilyn: I've felt I've been on a very steep learning curve but I've also thought that I've been brave - I go 'right, okay, I'm going to talk to you about this, I'm going to talk in a mature way and we're going to come to a compromise ... it's not about what you think, or what I think, it's about what's best for that child', and all the problems that are in there, it's always about the child.

Facilitator: So there's something governing what actually happens in the end, you keep pointing to the child.

Marilyn: Yeah, yeah, yeah, the child, the child, the child, and I think that's what we always have to think of.

In Marilyn's account, discourses of child-centredness appear to exert a powerful and pervasive influence – 'governing' how she thinks about things. Discourses of child-centredness bridge a range of pedagogical approaches to children's development and educators' practice (Chung and Walsh 2000). The term 'child-centred' broadly refers to putting children's 'interests, needs, and development' (Cannella and Viruru 2002, 117) at the centre of curricular and pedagogical decision-making.

In Marilyn's account, the child is re-centred as the locus for all decisions, through an assemblage of rationalising and reorienting movements. This re-centring redraws the territory of what becomes possible for Marilyn and another staff member to think (and do), as well as what subjectivities become possible for them.

The rationalising and reorienting movements that come through the fragments above recall Cannella and Viruru's (2002) critique of child-centred speech, in which

discourses shaping the 'good mother' result in a narrow construction of female identity as tied to younger human beings. Within these discourses, women and children are both regulated, expected to live their lives within a dominant construction that is child-centeredness. (134)

While we are certainly not arguing against respect for children's rights and well-being in early childhood settings, we are suggesting that educators' ways of negotiating powerful discourses that centre children and de-centre educators, might produce subjectivities that are hard to sustain.

In an artwork produced by Marilyn as part of the research study (featured below, Figure 1), some of these possibilities for discourses of child-centredness to produce particular subjectivities are evident. Of her artwork, Marilyn said (in an individual research conversation):

I wanted the children to be sort of the focus of it. Because ultimately, in the context of early childhood, that's what it has to be ... Everybody who works within early childhood has to be like that.

Researcher: [in the artwork] the children are very concrete but the representation of the other people who are involved, is not – is abstract.

Marilyn: Yeah, well there is a person under there, but you just can't see it, because I covered it with paint. I don't know, there's no reason for that, I wasn't thinking about that at all.

In the follow-up focus group discussion (which Marilyn unfortunately could not attend), participants wondered about the invisibility of educators in the children's journey across the bridge in the artwork:
Figure 1. Marilyn’s artwork.

Di: Do you think there’s no educators there because she [Marilyn] feels that educators don’t have that much of a voice – that there’s no visible educators? You’ve said you see them there but I look at it and I don’t – I’m not artistic so I don’t see them.
Monica: I can’t see them either.
Di: Now why are they not there, but yet the regs are there in this huge big area?
Lyn: But they’ve [the educators] got no say.
Monica: They have become a bit more invisible haven’t they? Di and Sharlene interject ‘I think the opposite’/ ‘yeah, opposite’.
Monica: … I think that we’re getting swamped by all these shards down here [the regulations] and once upon a time we were the drivers – in the 80s I think the regulations were part of them [the teachers] but now they are part of the regulations and everything else that goes with it.

Marilyn’s artwork brought to mind a number of elements for these focus group members: educators’ voice, their (in)visibility, regulations and relations with regulations, and ‘everything else that goes with it’. While the group agreed that educators were not visible in the artwork, Di and Sharlene’s interjections suggested their sense of a growing visibility of educators, rather than Monica’s sense that educators have become ‘more invisible’.
Kerry, a university-qualified educator with over 30 years’ experience and in a centre director position, had quite a different entryway for her sense of educators’ subjectivities:

I think we as professionals, have at last, because we were too busy trying to make sure that families and children survived this as a very positive experience – and I’m talking about early childhood – and it didn’t matter, like our needs were secondary to that. And I think, you know we’ve started to say ‘Well hello, if you want us to do the best job for you, then you have to recognise that we’re part of this thing, and as professionals, not as “those nice ladies who look after the children”’. (Much assenting sound from the whole focus group followed)

Kerry’s account contrasts with Marilyn’s, in which, discourses of child-centredness seemed to govern, and produce, particular subjectivities. Although Kerry was not explicitly challenging discourses of child-centredness in the fragment above, her conceptualisation of educators as firmly ‘part of this thing’, and her assertion of their ‘needs’ alongside those of children’s and families’, produces a subjectivity that is not governed by discourses of child-centredness. Both the individual and group discussions, through which the data fragments above were generated, illustrate some of the ways that refrains of complexity and practice refrains are intertwined. Clearly, relations between educators and discourses and children in practice assemblages, and what is produced through these relations are highly complex. To understand more about how these relations might work, we turn next to exploring data fragments illustrating some of the resources educators draw upon to negotiate complexities.

**Theoretical resources**

In the following data fragments from individual research conversations, Sharlene (an educator with 11 years of experience and studying to upgrade her vocational qualifications to an early childhood teaching degree) and Vanessa (an educator with 20 years of experience who has been involved in thinking and teaching with postmodern ideas at university level) talked about some of the thinking that they have developed to help negotiate complexity in early childhood practice:

Sharlene: I started to realise that you need to come in in the middle or sometimes you need to go to their [another staff member’s] side of the fence for certain situations. It doesn’t mean you have to alter your belief but you just have to accommodate something else.

Vanessa: just because you say ‘okay in this situation I’m just going to decide that it’s a better choice for me to let that go’, it doesn’t mean that in another setting, or in another situation that you let go of what you truly believe ... ‘What’s more important in this moment?’ ... it doesn’t have to only be one way or the other and every situation is different...

Vanessa: I really, I love that idea that things aren’t black and white ... And that’s the basis of those [post modern approaches] isn’t it? ... it’s very liberating that things don’t have to be one way or the other ... being able to bend like that ... makes my job easier and makes me keep going and makes it okay.

Researcher: But you can bend without breaking.

Vanessa: Yes, absolutely. And there will always be some things that you don’t – you won’t move on.
Both Sharlene and Vanessa had developed the capacity for being flexible enough to accommodate differences without compromising beliefs that were important to them. Sharlene attributed this to reflexively ‘starting to realise’ the need to find a middle ground, while Vanessa attributed her capacity to her active, ongoing engagement with post-modern theoretical perspectives. In ‘being able to bend’, or ‘accommodate’, without feeling compromised, these educators were also developing the ability to hold and practice with multiple realities – that is, not only understanding theoretical ideas, but accepting and living the validity of multiple perspectives, and fluid ways of relating and making decisions.

Research that has engaged educators in sustained thinking with complex theoretical perspectives (such as Moyles 2001; Edwards 2006; Olsson 2009) suggests that developing the ability to put these perspectives to work – as have Sharlene and Vanessa – can play an important role in ways educators understand relations within early childhood practice. In particular, for Vanessa, having (what she refers to as) post-modern ideas to draw upon is ‘liberating’ – using the ideas makes her job easier and helps her ‘keep going’. Similarly, putting these theoretical resources to work has enabled Vanessa to be in practice assemblages in ways that are sometimes fluid, sometimes flexible and sometimes final (the ‘things you won’t move on’). Her movements can be adaptive, opening, stabilising or challenging with the other elements in her practice assemblages.

**Working the lines**

Although Vanessa and Sharlene had developed fluid ways of negotiating the complexity of early childhood practice and of understanding what subjectivities these ways produced, for two other participants – Lara and Esther – more rigid ways of understanding relations in practice assemblages were appealing:

Lara: ... **where’s the line** for how far away from the philosophy and the way that you run your centre, **how far away from the norm do you go for individual children**? We have the right to run our centre and organise things in a certain way – which can have a great deal of flexibility to individual children – but **where’s the line when we stop catering to** – we end up catering to every single need from the family for how they want it run, by how they have their children at home, versus the philosophy in the way that we run our rooms and the way that we run our centres – **where is that line**?

Through her reiteration of ‘where’s the line?’ there is a sense of Lara’s desire for a clear territory, a demarcation between families’ home assemblages and practice assemblages in early childhood settings. The focus group discussion (from which this fragment comes) later turned to ways participants might negotiate tensions such as those described by Lara (who had recently graduated with a teaching degree and was already in a room leader position). Lara then indicated that, for her, regulatory discourses played an important role in determining where the ‘line’ between these assemblages should fall: ‘that’s where the regs come in – are you covered if someone comes to do a spot check? ... If you have it too loose, to not have it set, are you leaving yourself open?’ For Lara, it seemed that the uncertainty of ‘leaving yourself open’, or between having things ‘set’ or ‘too loose’, could be stabilised (what she describes as ‘covered’) by shaping decisions to fit in with the regulations.
Esther, who had 30 years of experience working with children and was studying for her Bachelor of Teaching, described her relations with regulations this way:

Facilitator: So how does it make you feel to know you’re doing the right thing according to the regulations?
Esther: **Proud, very proud.**
Facilitator: Proud?
Esther: Yes, **and it makes me feel so confident – you know that you’re doing the right thing**, and because it’s important for me, important for everybody else. And not only that, the parents and staff respect you, because you know what you’re doing is right – for them and their children.

As Esther went on to discuss during the individual research conversation, her adherence to regulations, and to what she was learning in formal education settings, was steadfast:

**I’m a strong person, I just do what I’ve been told, what I’ve learnt through TAFE and uni, whatever they gave me, this is what I’ve learnt, even though they [other staff she has worked with] don’t like it … I just ignore it, and do my job.**

Even when an unwillingness to adapt within workplace cultures and contexts seemed to sometimes leave her isolated from her colleagues, Esther’s pride in doing things according to the rules, and to what formal knowledge has set up for her as the ‘right thing’, demarcated a clear territory within which she was confident in her sense of professionalism. From the readings of the data fragments above, it is clear that negotiating the complexity of early childhood practice sometimes involves rigid and sometimes fluid approaches to working with discourses, and the subjectivities these produce. In the second part of our discussion of data fragments, we build on this discussion about refrains of the complexity of early childhood practice by focusing upon ways that educators are part of the affective capacity of early childhood practice assemblages. We also focus on what is produced by the collective capacity of these assemblages.

**Part two**

**Affective capacity of assemblages**

Di: for me, I think the relationship that I have with [other staff in the room] is going to reflect in the children … it’s going to reflect in what happens in the children’s attitudes and the way we get things done. I want things to be done with passion, I want things to be done with love and kindness and – I think because I work in the baby room, babies … pick up very quickly if you’re unhappy or unsettled or un-whatever.

Di’s sense of connections and relations between staff, the ways things are done and the elicitation of particular ‘attitudes’ in babies, suggests some of the complex, affective ways practice assemblages can work – by modulating the ways things were done – with ‘passion’, ‘love’ and ‘kindness’ – the emotional was materialised in visceral affect for the babies. In this way, moderating her own affective capacity had implications for the affective capacity of the practice assemblage as a whole.

Exchanges of the emotional, the visceral and the rational were also implicated in Vanessa’s negotiations in practice assemblages:
Vanessa: My gut reaction is — I can't stand being — I really get cranky. But I know that it has to — there have to be boundaries. I suppose I just have to swallow it sometimes and just go ‘well I've just got to do this’. This is part of the job’ … I can feel cross about it but, ultimately when, it's going to be okay and my job will still be the job that I love, I've just got to get into line a little bit, maybe.

Here, Vanessa describes complex movements and exchanges between elements that are part of herself, and also part of the practice assemblage: the visceral (her ‘gut reaction’, and having to ‘swallow it’); feelings named as emotions (‘cranky’, ‘cross’ and ‘love’); and rationalities (‘I know … there have to be boundaries’ ‘I've just got to do this’). For Deleuze and Guattari, having a gut reaction, or (as Vanessa describes) having to ‘swallow it sometimes’ are not metaphors for something else — they are accepted as real and active parts of how assemblages work. Further, movements such as these have what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call affect — the capacity for producing change in the potential of bodies to act. As Vanessa ‘swallows’ her crankiness then, this embodied act is part of an assemblage of movements that changes her capacity to act — in this case, impelling her to ‘get into line’ — to fit (herself) within the ‘boundaries’ of the job.

In the following fragment, Lyn (an educator with a VET qualification and 24 years of experience) describes another facet of complexity — exchanges of the relational and physical in a practice assemblage:

Lyn: they [parents] have this look — you can sort of know with the look on their faces — you go: ‘we need to get your trust a little bit more here’ — but you can see it — you know the signs — I mean I have been in childcare for a long time so I pick up all the signs.
Facilitator: Tell me about the signs?
Lyn: So you will get different expressions on faces and you will get the hesitation too — and some parents might stay around a little bit longer than when they say — ‘oh yeah they'll be fine’ — so you know that they still have that bit of anxiety and they still don't 100% trust what's going on here at the moment.

In this fragment, Lyn, was not simply mechanistically applying what she knew from having been ‘in childcare for a long time’, in order to gain parents’ trust. Rather, she ‘knows’ through what she ‘gets’ from facial expressions, and through her readings of non-verbal movements such as ‘hesitations’. These readings combine with her years of experience to enable her to ‘pick up’ the signs. The complexity of the practice assemblage (of which she was part) included then, intricate, interlinked movements of seeing—reading—knowing that engaged the past, the present and the future, and that modulated relationships incrementally — eliciting a little bit more’ trust between parents and herself as an educator, not just a binary movement from mistrust to trust in one jump.

The data fragments involving Di, Vanessa and Lyn illustrate ways that early childhood practice assemblages involve educators in affective movements that (sometimes) produce change through bodily sensations, their modulations (that is, not turning a feeling on or off, but changing its quality and intensity) and through cognitive engagement. These movements play out a key characteristic in Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualisation of assemblages — that collective capacity exceeds what any one part of the assemblage could achieve alone.
How do these readings contribute to understandings of the complexity of early childhood practice?

Using Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking about assemblages and refrains in this paper has generated new ideas for us in relation to complexity and early childhood practice. In the following discussion, we will consider four interconnected ways that our readings help articulate and contribute to understandings of the complexity of early childhood practice.

One way that our readings of data fragments help to articulate complexity, is by showing how refrains work in assemblages. In particular, how crystallisations of elements in different combinations are implicated in expanding or limiting possibilities for transformation and change through practice assemblages. So, for example, in the data fragments involving Marilyn, there is a momentary crystallisation of elements – an assemblage – that includes herself, another staff member, subjectivities, a sense of conflict and compromise, and discourses of child-centredness. Marilyn negotiates the complexity of this practice assemblage through a refrain – reiterating that educators always need to be thinking about ‘the child, the child, the child’. Elements of the assemblage crystallise around this refrain of ‘the child’, effectively governing and limiting possibilities for what can be produced by herself, as well as for the staff member mentioned in the data fragment.

The effect (in a Deleuzean sense – limiting potential for change) of this discursive refrain continues into Marilyn’s account of her artwork, where, as she herself notes of the artwork – ‘there is a person under there, but you just can’t see it’. Yet, other possibilities were evident in the focus group discussion of the invisibility of educators in the artwork, especially through Di and Sharlene’s interjections, and in Kerry’s account of being ‘part of this thing’. Together, these accounts suggest some other ways of negotiating discourses that produce educators as visible parts of practice assemblages, and as alongside, rather than subordinate to, families and children.

Another way our readings help to expand understandings of the complexity of early childhood practice, relates to participants’ more/less rigid or fluid ways of understanding relations of self with other elements in practice assemblages. For example, being able to accommodate differences, or to bend and be flexible, allowed Sharlene and Vanessa, to negotiate combinations of elements in ways specific to each situation. However, having a more regularised approach to ways of doing and being in practice assemblages was preferable for Lara and Esther. In the same way that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe assemblages as involving movements between the rigid and supple then, part of the complexity of early childhood practice is that it involves movements between stabilising, disrupting and re-stabilising forces – complexity is not a constant state.

A fourth way we hope to contribute to better articulating and understanding the complexity of early childhood practice is through thinking about educators, children and families as part of practice assemblages. Conceptualising human elements as de-centred in assemblages can assist recognition of ways that elements work together in refrains and practice assemblages to produce change. Examples of these ways include: Vanessa swallowing anger over the need for boundaries; Di modulating the affective capacity of the practice assemblage involving babies; and Lyn reading the signs in practice assemblages. The data fragments involving Vanessa, Di and Lyn also illuminate ideas expressed in existing literature in new ways. For example, staff interactions have been identified (O’Gorman and Hard 2013) as a facet of the
complexity of early childhood practice. However, the data fragment involving Di shows how complexity also works through modulations of the ways things are done amongst the staff, as ‘love, passion, kindness’ are reflected in ‘what happens in the children’s attitudes’.

Thinking about connections between elements in assemblages as not necessarily tethered to an individual (e.g. thinking of a circulating ‘kindness’, rather than ‘Di’s’ kindness), but as holding the potential for contributing to change can also help disrupt discursive refrains that focus mainly on individualised, cognitively oriented judgement and decision-making. For example, although the co-constructive learning relationships of children and educators are recognised in the EYLF, early childhood practice is mostly represented as an individually undertaken, often cognitive activity, predicated on a rational or linear application of professional judgement in response to children. However, our readings of the data fragments included in this paper show the complexity of early childhood practice as involving the collective capacity of practice assemblages and intricately interlinked movements of the relational, visceral and sensory which do not operate solely in cognitive ways.

Concluding thoughts

In this paper, we have endeavoured to expand conceptualisations of the complexity of early childhood practice, and ways of articulating this complexity, by putting to work some of Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking about refrains and assemblages. We have shown how refrains of the complexity of early childhood practice work; by drawing in and acting upon elements in practice assemblages: educators; children; feelings; sensations; discourses and, and, and … that affect how change comes about. And further, that educators are among the elements crystallised by refrains into practice assemblages. Educators can be affected by the movements of refrains (such as discourses of child-centredness) across practice assemblages; but, they also contribute to the refrains themselves – according to their ways of negotiating complexity. In this way, educators can be understood as both made by, and makers of, early childhood practice. Complexity was also inflected in the analytic strategies used to generate the readings. Through these strategies, the researcher acted as an assemblage converter, whose processes of reading intensively were implicated in movements between forming and reforming assemblages of data – in the forms of words, senses and gestures.

By contributing to making visible some of the ways complexity works in early childhood practice assemblages, we hope to have added to conceptual understandings of complexity, and to have advanced more nuanced and negotiated conceptualisations of early childhood practice. In times when policy openings to complexity have the potential for moving towards restrictive regulation, or equally, continuing to allow for nuanced and negotiated movements, it becomes even more important to keep space open for the complexity of early childhood practice to flourish. Thinking of early childhood practice as constituted through the flows of rigid and supple ways of being and doing in practice assemblages may be one way that educators, policy-makers and teacher educators can keep multiple conceptualisations open.

Notes

1. In NSW, preschools operate during school hours and in school term-time only. Long day care centres also provide a preschool programme with a university-qualified teacher; however, they operate for longer hours, and throughout the year.
2. Di is an educator with a vocational education and training [VET] diploma and 5 years of experience in prior-to-school settings. She also has around 20 years of primary school teaching experience.

References


Article Five

A Politics of Imperceptibilities, Possibilities and Early Childhood Practice

TAMARA CUMMING & JENNIFER SUMSION
Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education, Charles Sturt University, Australia

ABSTRACT A growing body of research suggests that a range of 'hidden' or 'less tangible' aspects of early childhood practice play an important part in early childhood practice. The purpose of this article is to contribute to this existing research literature by identifying some of the complex ways that less tangible aspects work. To do this, the authors focus on a data fragment describing ways that conceptualisations of 'secret' are at work in one educator's practice. To give readings of this data fragment, the authors use a strategy of 'plugging in' everyday and theoretical understandings of 'the secret', and, a popular culture text. The authors also use post-structural understandings of 'being' and 'language', and additional illustrative data fragments to illuminate these complex aspects of practice at work. The article concludes by considering some implications and cautions of the politics of possibility that the readings of imperceptibility and early childhood practice have opened.

Participant: It almost is like a secret language of its own.
Researcher: What is?
P: Being an early childhood educator [1] we've got all the – we all know that you – I don't have to say to Mary Jane, 'Go and stand over there because you need your back against the wall because you need to look at all the children' ... We automatically know that. We speak about pedagogy and speak about all these words that – these now little secret words. Or we bend down to look at the children so the children can look at us in our faces. It's almost like this little secret movement we've got going on. (Data fragment from an interview with an early childhood educator)

Is the secret in the content or in the form? And the answer is already apparent: neither. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 289)

Introduction

There is growing recognition of the complexity of early childhood practice in policy discourses in many national contexts, as well as in research concerned with educators' practice. For example, in Australia's national curriculum for prior to school early childhood settings – the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Australian Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009) – complexity is evident in characterisations of educators' professional judgements as requiring a weaving together of educators' professional knowledge and skills ... awareness of how their beliefs and values impact on children's learning, personal styles and past experiences'. Their 'creativity, intuition and imagination' are also required, in order to 'improvise and adjust practice' to learning contexts (p. 11).

The complexities evident in these quotes from the EYLF also gesture to what have been described as 'less tangible' aspects of practice (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2003). We see these as relational, affective, sometimes 'hidden' (Goodfellow, 2003) aspects of practice that are difficult to
observe and measure, yet that also seem to play an important role in how early childhood practice works (see also, Cumming et al., 2014). Examples from existing research concerned with educators’ practice include practical wisdom – ‘the hidden dimensions of professional practice ... an educator’s capacity to make sound judgement in the use of personal/professional, theoretical, and practical knowledge’ (Goodfellow, 2003, p. 48) – and ‘attunement to one’s colleagues’ (Dalli, 2011, p. 279).

These examples of ‘less tangible’ aspects of practice tend to draw upon humanist conceptualisations of practice, whereby individual educators might be seen as making decisions based on their rational, intuitive or emotional judgments. In contrast, researchers working with posthumanist perspectives are articulating other aspects of the complexity of educators’ practice that seem to produce change out of the unknown. These aspects have included, for example, what is produced in encounters between human and other-than-human elements (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010), and between forces, sensations and materials (Giugni, 2011). Affective ways of knowing and learning – what Olsson (2009, p. 3) calls ‘bodily logics’ – and the possibilities that might emerge from spaces in-between events in time (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013) have also been explored. Together with the examples in the previous paragraph, these encounters suggest some of the ways that possibilities can, and do spring from less tangible aspects of early childhood practice.

Early childhood educators’ practice operates in policy contexts where multiple conceptualisations of practice may be perceived to be closing (for example, in Denmark, Jensen et al., 2010), opening (for example, in the United Kingdom [UK], Nuthbrown, 2012), or offering both possibilities (as in Australia, Cumming et al., under review). With these possibilities in mind, our purpose in this article is to explore other ways that important, yet less tangible, aspects of early childhood practice are at work – and implications these understandings might have for the politics of this work. To do this, we use a strategy of ‘plugging in’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) a number of texts to give readings of ways that ‘the secret’ works in the data fragment in the epigraph. We begin by outlining the source of the data fragment that opens this article, our reasons for choosing to work with this fragment, and the analytic strategies we brought to the task. We then outline two very different resources relating to secrets that we plugged in to the fragment. Firstly, everyday and theoretical concepts of secret, including ideas from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Colebrook (2010), who highlight the productive capacity of secret. Secondly, an encounter with an episode of the television series Peppa Pig (Astley & Baker, 2005) that shows how understandings of secret are interconnected. Next, we give three readings of the data fragment in the epigraph, using post-structural ideas about ‘being’ and ‘language’, and additional data fragments from the same research project as further illustrations of our readings. We conclude with a discussion of what new thinking about less tangible aspects of early childhood practice have become possible by exploring how secret works in the data fragments, and, some possible implications of this thinking for educators’ practice, and the politics of this work.

Identifying and Working with the Data Fragment

The data fragment in the epigraph comes from a research conversation with an experienced diploma-qualified early childhood educator, working as a room leader with birth–two-year-old children in a long day care centre in Sydney, Australia. The educator was a participant in a study that set out to explore ways that early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing practice (for further details see Cumming et al., 2013). Our interest in this topic was explored by asking educators about their ways of working with mixed messages (defined for participants as contradictory ideas about ways of doing and being in early childhood settings). This way of framing educators’ negotiation of discourses and subjectivities was chosen in order to highlight the multiple, sometimes competing, ideas, regulations, beliefs, and so on, that are involved in educators’ practice. We also anticipated that working from the idea of mixed messages would enable a focus on how practice was working, and the possibilities that this produced for educators.

The quote that opens this article was generated during a loosely structured research conversation between the participant and Tamara. These conversations were a second stage in research that also included initial and follow-up focus group discussions, and participants’ production of visual material in response to the initial focus group discussion. The visual material
generated by each participant (such as Figure 1) was used to stimulate discussion in the individual research conversations, and, with the follow-up focus group of which each participant was part.

The fragment in the epigraph was selected as the focus of the current article for its resonant quality – that is, the fragment continually jumped-out of the transcript; it seemed to ‘glow’, and to have what MacLure (2006, p. 229) describes as the ‘transgressive jolt ... that makes us think again, and more slowly about what is taken for granted’. Identifying material to work with (such as this fragment) by attending to ‘visceral prompts’ (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 79), and affective alerts (such as those described above), are akin to what Deleuze describes as processes of ‘reading intensively’, in which ‘there’s nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging in to an electric circuit’ (1995, p. 8).

Reading intensively is a way of being open to multiple aspects of texts, and of orientating to the possibilities produced in readings of texts, rather than towards representing what participants or a particular text means (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). On reading the data fragment intensively, for example, a jolt seemed to come through the sudden appearance and repetition of the word ‘secret’ in the data fragment, and the concepts ‘language’, ‘words’, and ‘movement’ with which it connected. A jolt also seemed to come through moments of stop and start as the participant struggled to put something unnamed (or unnameable) into words, and, in the ambiguity in the data fragment – for example, we were not sure how it was possible to ‘be’ a secret language. In addition, unfinished sentences, such as ‘we’ve got all the – we all know that you ...’, gave a sense that there was more to this fragment, and to the concept of secret, than what was, or could be, spoken by the participant. These unexpected and intriguing aspects led to questions about how the concept of the secret was at work in this data fragment. In the next part of the article, we explore some conceptualisations of the secret, beginning with everyday understandings, then considering Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas. We also include an encounter with Peppa Pig as a way of further illustrating the possibilities that conceptualisations of ‘the secret’ can open up in relation to early childhood practice.

Conceptualisations of (the) Secret

In an everyday sense, secrets are often thought about in relation to content – a secret that is ‘kept hidden from others or known only to oneself or to a few’, or something that remains beyond understanding or explanation; a mystery (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2009, n.p.). The ‘something’ might be an object, information, ideas or gossip, for example, that someone or a group of people have ‘judged fitting to isolate or disguise for various reasons’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 316). These understandings of secret are tied, firstly, to there being some kind of content requiring, or being worth, hiding (i.e. that it has value to someone, and likely to others). Secondly, to be secret, access to the content must be withheld or restricted – so that its secrecy depends on a lack or scarcity. Thirdly, that this secret is defined, and maintained, by a human subject or subjects.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 316) have another way of thinking about secret – as the interplay of ‘perception and the imperceptible’. They argue that the quality of imperceptibility – what is sensed, but is not able to be fully known – offers limitless possibilities for expression by human subjects. That is, rather than being limited to particular content that is either known or unknown by human subjects, secrets are conceptualised as forces of positive imperceptibility (Colebrook, 2010). These forces are becoming – not towards a particular point, and not limited to particular content, but on the move, and always on the threshold of something, or somewhere else.

At the same time, and as the quote from Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 289) in the epigraph suggests, there is ongoing exchange between secrets working as (limited) content, and as (unlimited) imperceptibility. These relations came to life for us in a chance encounter with an episode of a children’s television series. Peppa Pig. In the episode ‘Secrets’ (Astley & Baker, 2005), Mummy Pig gives Peppa a box in which she can hide ‘secrets’. Peppa keenly grabs the box, and her eyes dart side to side in anticipation of having a secret of her own, especially one she can hide from her little brother, George. Peppa hides something in the box (as viewers, we do not know what it is), and to her delight, neither George, her father or mother guess what is inside. The tables are turned on Peppa when Mummy Pig also gives George a box for secrets and Peppa cannot guess
what is inside George’s box. All returns to balance when Peppa and George each reveal what is in
their box at the same time.

Before Peppa places something into the box, the force of imperceptibility is at work as the
possibilities of secrets (rather than particular contents of the box that are given the status of secrets)
proliferate. However, once Peppa has placed something into the box – and knows what the secret
is – the possibilities for expressions of imperceptibility are closed to her. The possibilities of the
secret proliferate again as Peppa interacts with her family and they try to guess the secret content
(could it be Daddy Pig’s glasses, Mummy Pig’s shoes, or George’s dinosaur?). As none of these is
correct, the (particular) secret remains imperceptible, and its possibilities proliferate until it is
revealed.

Once the secret content is revealed in the Peppa Pig episode, the contents (musical
instruments) lose the unlimited potentiality that goes with being secret (Colebrook, 2010), and this
potentiality returns to the empty box. However, the contents that have been revealed are
becoming secret again through their potential for combining with other elements (human,
material, senses, forces) to undertake other functions. In these ways, secrets can be seen as forces or
movements between imperceptibility and content, rather than simply one state or the other.

We now return to the data fragment, and consider what new thinking about less tangible
aspects of early childhood practice might become possible by plugging in the understandings of
secrets explained above. We explore three ways that secret is at work in the data fragment – firstly
through connections between secret and language in the description of being an early childhood
educator; secondly, ways in which secret is at work as positive imperceptibility (Colebrook, 2010);
and thirdly, connections of secret with embodied movements and notions of ‘secret societies’
(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 317).

Readings

**Being a Secret Language**

One way that the notion of secret is at work in the data fragment is through connecting with
language in the participant’s description of ‘being an early childhood educator’ as ‘almost like a
secret language of its own’. From a post-structural perspective, ‘to be is to be related’, ‘nothing ever
“is” alone’ (Mol, 2002, p. 54). Being can be understood then as a momentary expression of the
relations in which human subjects find themselves – a stabilisation of otherwise shifting and
relational processes (Lenz Taguchi, 2011). This way of being might be characterised as ‘becoming’
– as always at the threshold of something, or somewhere, else.

Conceptualising being as a momentary stabilisation of becoming (rather than as a static
position) foregrounds the possibilities for ways that educators connect with other human and
other-than-human elements, forces and sensations in early childhood settings. This is also how
Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest language works – in continuous combinations with other
elements. These combinations create order, disrupt order, or facilitate movement to other
possibilities. Being an educator as an embodied ‘secret language’ then, can be read as a sense of
merging with other elements into a fluid and relational force. It is through these combined forces
that things happen in early childhood settings.

These fluid and relational forces can be seen at work in the following imagined scenario,
which was outlined by the participant in the same research conversation that generated the data
fragment in the epigraph. In the following scenario, she describes what her actions would be (and
her rationale for these actions) if a child’s feelings had gone beyond the child’s control:

> So this child could be the child ... that is smacking somebody else or the child that is swearing or
> whatever the little scenario is. But this child’s got to the stage now where they’re out of control
> ... as the educator, you need to be calm, you need to be kind – and he needs me to stay with him
> until we feel that we both understand what the feeling is and he’s not on his own.

The example above conveys a sense of the child’s body, the educator’s body, their collective
feelings, the smacking and the swearing, and the events that preceded and followed them merging
into one. The process of merging (shown in italics) in the imagined scenario ensured that the child
was ‘not on his own’ with feelings that had gone beyond his control. Staying with each other in
close proximity and enabling the child’s ‘out of control’ feelings to merge with the educator’s ‘calm’ and ‘kind’ response allowed new understandings to emerge. One such shared understanding is of ‘what the feeling is’ and the child realising that he was not alone. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to these processes of merging for particular functions as assemblages. A key quality of assemblages is that by merging, the elements have a collective capacity greater than their parts. In the example above, the understanding produced through the merging of the various elements creates order (in the child’s feelings and in the setting) and facilitates movement to other possibilities. In this scenario, in merging with the child to create new possibilities, the educator has embodied being ‘a secret language’.

Secret and the Imperceptible

Another way that secret is at work in the data fragment is through the quality of imperceptibility – the sense that there is ‘something’ at work, but uncertainty as to what exactly it is. For example, the participant says: ‘we’ve got all the – we all know that you – I don’t have to say ... We automatically know that’. There is evidently something that the ‘we’ have ‘got’ and ‘know’, yet she does not, or cannot, quite pin this down. This is the interplay of perception, imperceptibility and expression that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) include in their notion of secret. It is also implicated in some of the research that we referred to earlier, regarding less tangible aspects of early childhood practice.

How might the imperceptibility of secret – that which is uncertain or unpredictable – be productive in early childhood settings? To explore this idea, we turn to Colebrook’s (2010, p. 293) argument for the ‘positivity’ of imperceptibility which she contrasts with the deficit created by the perception of not knowing a secret. Colebrook says that it is from the uncertainty of secrecy – from what is not specified, not certain, not for sure – that multiple possibilities can be expressed. In the data fragment in the epigraph, for example, ‘bending down’ is done with a particular purpose – ‘so the children can look at us in our faces’. However, exactly what happened or happens next – for the educator, for the child, for the assemblage of which they are part – is unknown. As Colebrook also suggests, imperceptibility proliferates with possibilities that are beyond (and will always be more than) what human subjects see and know, and always more than human subjects can express. It is from this unknowness that ‘lines of perception and interpretation’ (p. 287) can be activated, and via these lines that there is room for innovation to flourish.

The following visual material and accompanying comments (produced by a different participant as part of her response to the initial focus group discussion) show how lines of perception and interpretation can be expressed in early childhood settings:

![Image of shoes and a shoebox]

Figure 1. Picking flowers.

you don’t always have to follow the rules, or not the rules, you don’t always have to do what’s right because if you do, you miss out on lots of beautiful things. Maybe that’s what it is. Or not, I don’t know – maybe you can miss – if you don’t open your eyes to what’s bigger than the norm, or whatever, you’re missing out on stuff because to me, this is beautiful ... I could’ve said, ‘don’t pick

372
the flowers or the leaves and put your shoes on the shoe rack ... And if we don’t keep things open to allow for those possibilities, you miss those, you miss that ... But in that moment – because there’s maybe something ... maybe at that moment, there was something far more important happening.

In this fragment, and in Figure 1, imperceptibility is at work in this participant’s sense of ‘what’s bigger than the norm’, in keeping ‘things open for ... possibilities’, and in the ‘maybe something’ that is ‘far more important’ than following the rules. Although what the participant senses is never completely clarified, she works with the imperceptibility in productive ways. Even in making this photograph, she has recognised the possibilities of things being and becoming more than what they first appear. The flowers, leaves, shoes, socks and decking, along with her own shadow, and the traces of the children who placed the materials, work as an assemblage with open-ended possibilities. Being open to the unpredictability and uncertainty of other possibilities in this way – acknowledging and working from her ‘perception of potentialities’ (Colebrook, 2010, p. 291) rather than following the ‘rules’ or ‘right ways’ – has allowed her to negotiate dominant narratives of how things should be in an early childhood setting. In this way, valuing and allowing for the unpredictable and transgressive has kept space open for expression and innovation to flourish, and for new lines of potentiality to be activated.

Secret Movements

The notion of secret also connects with movement in the original data fragment in both bodily movements of bending and standing and in what the participant describes as a ‘secret movement going on’. In her account, the examples of bodily movements – standing with your back against the wall, bending down to look at the children – are practices that are as much a part of being ‘a secret language’ as are ‘speaking the secret words’. As the participant indicates, the doing of a movement is not necessarily a conscious act – it is done in what seems an automatic way, a way that does not need to be said – but that nonetheless embodies what is known, and something imperceptible besides. In this way, being ‘a secret language’ is not just about what is known, what is said, or what is done, but about the possibilities that might be produced when all these things come together in combination with other elements in assemblages.

Further, seen as part of the embodied secret language, the function of these movements could be read simply as directing order, for example, standing in a particular way ‘so we can look at all the children’. However, the conjunction of speaking, bending and the sense of a ‘secret movement going on’, also gestures towards other possibilities. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 317) talk about imperceptibility sometimes operating like a ‘secret society’, that has particular ways of working, and of exercising influence. This influence can, for example, make particular ways of being or ways of talking about things possible, or even expected in particular settings, even while it is sensed but is not clear. So, in the data fragment, the participant’s sense of a ‘secret movement going on’ could gesture towards collective influences on and in the assemblages of which the participant is part. These collectivities might include: the profession, the academic community, policymakers, media, families, or an educators’ team. In this way, speaking secret words like pedagogy might demonstrate the discursive influence of some of these collectivities – perhaps in this case, discourses elicited by the academic community, or policy discourses, or relations between these and the assemblage of elements in an educators’ setting.

The relations of collectivities, with their attendant discourses (and the mixed messages these can create) illustrate what Deleuze and Guattari describe as micro- and macro-polities – the interweaving and exchange of forces of negotiated becomings (the micro), and regularising or stabilising forces (the macro). Speaking pedagogy as a ‘secret word’ might therefore demonstrate compliance with sanctioned ways of being, or might be operating as a ‘password’ (1987, p. 317) that demonstrates membership in the ‘secret movement’. Yet being an early childhood educator, and speaking the ‘secret language’, does not always automatically confer membership in the ‘secret movement’, as the following data fragment from one of the focus groups conducted as part of the broader research project shows:

even though my skin colour’s white, I am African, that’s African blood that runs in these veins ...
we had a casual [relief educator] in the room that was from [an African country] ... so a lot of comments that we had about this girl was that ‘she stinks’, and I’m not even talking about from
the children, though it did come from the children as well, but this came from the staff. She had her bachelor but ... she would work as an assistant because she hadn’t had her qualifications sorted out ... and even though I could talk to the (staff) and just say ‘look that’s part of their culture can you accept it?’ ... it’s like more than just this little isolated incident now ... I go to the director and we speak and she phones the agency and they deal with it like that ... but the whole thing was that she’s now picking up the vibe from the rest of the staff. She was at our centre twice a week for a prolonged amount of time, people aren’t talking to her, people don’t accept her, people are not – you know even just saying to her ‘How was your weekend?’.

This account comes from the same participant who generated the opening data fragment. Although she does not name the influence in this fragment as ‘a secret movement’, the style in which the ‘people’ who ‘aren’t talking to’ and ‘don’t accept’ the relief staff member are operating illustrates a shadow side to the ‘we’ of the original data fragment. In this second fragment, imperceptibilities (such as unspoken but sensed collective beliefs and prejudices) seem to coalesce as a ‘secret movement’ which acts to ostracise the relief educator, despite qualifications that might otherwise be seen as automatically granting membership in the ‘secret movement’. In this way, the experience of the relief educator with imperceptibility – the ‘content that is not disclosed’ (Colebrook, 2010, p. 287) – has not been the open-ended source of possibilities enjoyed by the ‘we’ who ‘know’. Rather, imperceptibility has been directed through collective influence, to foreclose possibilities for her to become part of the productive assemblages of the setting. Put another way, macro-political discourses such as inclusion and social justice have been disrupted, in this example, through micro-political movements by educators in ‘isolated incidents’. The force of these micro-politics coalesces to eventually include ‘the rest of the staff’ in a macro-political movement of exclusion.

Through the three readings presented above, being an early childhood educator is shown to be a complex and ever-shifting process that involves not only talking, but ‘embodied doing and handling the world and things around us’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2011, p. 39). While speaking particular words or making particular movements might embody the influence of groups beyond the immediate assemblage of which an educator is part, there remains something imperceptible yet productive, in the combination of elements as they come together. As the readings also show, these processes involve micro- and macro-political movements that can disrupt and reconfigure dominant discourses in more and less desirable ways.

A Discussion of the Readings

At the beginning of this article, we wondered about what new thinking about less tangible aspects of early childhood practice might become possible by plugging in multiple readings of secret, and what implications these understandings might have for the politics of this work. Here, we discuss some of our thinking, drawing out some possible implications for the politics of educators’ practice.

Imperceptibilities and Educators’ Practice

Reading the data fragments through conceptualisations of the secret has reinforced for us the value of attending to the imperceptible as a key aspect of early childhood practice. In this sense, the article reiterates what others have said about the importance and productiveness of less tangible aspects of practice. For example, the educator whose calm feelings merge with a child’s distressed feelings is practising the kind of attunement and ‘being present’ that Dalli (2011) recognises as helping to bring things together in practice. At the same time, however, our readings make a contribution beyond reiterating identified effects through reading closely some of the moments of practice that might otherwise remain taken-for-granted. This process makes visible some of the ways that less tangible aspects of early childhood practice work, and what possibilities they can produce, rather than simply identifying what they are. For example, the ‘bringing together’ of the educator’s and child’s feelings is more than the result of conscious judgement, skills and awareness (DEEWR, 2011), more even than ‘being present’ (Dalli, 2011, p. 237) – it works as a relational assemblage that produces new affective capacity for the child.
A Politics of Imperceptibilities, Possibilities and Early Childhood Practice

Our readings of the data fragments also show moments of early childhood practice as a ‘vital, intense and unpredictable experimentation’ (Olsson, 2009, p. 6), from which possibilities can, and do, spring. This is especially evident in the example of the educator who ‘keeps things open’ in relation to the children’s flower-picking, as she leaves space open for possibilities that are beyond her own perception. These are possibilities of the ‘in-between and the richness of spaces’ (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013, p. 228) for producing difference, rather than just an interval between points moving towards pre-determined ‘best outcomes’.

Politics and Educators’ Practice

Our focus on ways that secret that is at work in the data fragments also raised questions for us about the politics of subjectivity around ‘being’ an educator. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) emphasise, through relays of movements, assemblages are constantly undergoing change. Our readings show educators as innovators and producers of possibilities through engagements with other parts of assemblages. Moreover, our readings also demonstrated aspects of educators’ practice that involved unconscious, bodily logics (Olsson, 2009), such as ‘automatically’ knowing how or where to stand, or ‘the vibe’, that lie beyond the realm of readily observable or codifiable professional expertise. Conceptualising educators and practice as intertwined parts of assemblages therefore challenges dominant, humanist conceptualisations of educators as ‘autonomous subject[s], independent and detached from [their] environment’ (a view that Hultman and Lenz Taguchi [2010, p. 525] also criticise).

Reading examples of the productive capacity of imperceptibility also highlighted some politics of possibility – what Giardina and Newman explain as being ‘generated out of, generating possibilities within, and opening, pathways outside of existing conditions and flows’ (2011, p. 400, original emphasis). In addition, we contend that a politics of possibility includes the exchanges between minor and major politics – a dynamic that can be seen at work in the example of the ostracised relief educator discussed earlier in the article. The ‘pathways outside of existing conditions and flows’ that were produced from imperceptibility in this example suggest the necessity of acknowledging that possibilities produced from imperceptibilities are not universally ‘positive’ (Colebrook, 2010), nor necessarily just.

A final politics of possibility that we wish to acknowledge concerns our contentions about the importance of imperceptibility and less tangible aspects of practice. Despite the emerging recognition of the complexity involved in early childhood practice in policy discourses, such as in the Australian context, it is not yet clear whether educators’ (self-reported) sense of marginalisation as a profession (Fenech et al, 2009) has been alleviated, or whether there is now more public recognition of the complexity of early childhood practice. The possible persistence of deficit discourses regarding the profession could mean that ideas like fluid and relational being (rather than having an identity grounded in status as a professional, for example), or that productive aspects of practice will always be imperceptible, might exacerbate educators’ sense that they, and their practice, are poorly recognised.

Conclusion

In this article, we have read moments of imperceptibility – in which there is a sense of ‘something’ at work, but uncertainty as to what exactly it is – as spaces from which multiple lines of perception and interpretation might flow. As we have also suggested, however, the possibilities produced through imperceptibility can be more or less desirable for individual educators, as well as for the profession as a whole. Our readings therefore contribute to (keeping) possibilities open for more fluid understandings of the work of educators, whilst also highlighting some of the politics of possibilities. The politics we have attended to reiterate the importance of not romanticising educators’ practice (as raised by Sumion, 2003), nor imagining that opportunities for interpretation and expression of possibilities are uniformly available to all educators. In the same way as studies by Olsson (2009) and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2013) suggest, working with, rather than trying to tame or erase less tangible forces (such as those we have discussed), may lead to new possibilities for pedagogical engagements. At the same time, continued attention to how practices work, and how
educators negotiate assemblages of practices is crucial, in order to sustain an early childhood workforce, and, educators themselves.

Notes
[1] The term ‘early childhood educators’ (also abbreviated to ‘educators’) is used here as a generic term for those working directly with children aged birth-five years. In this context, educators may have university, vocational, or no qualifications in early childhood education.

References
A Politics of Imperceptibilities, Possibilities and Early Childhood Practice


---

TAMARA CUMMING* is an academic researcher whose work focuses upon the sustainability of the early childhood workforce, and the complexity of early childhood practice. Tamara’s other research interests include interprofessional working relationships, post-structural research strategies, and using research to support practitioners to make complexity visible in their practice. Correspondence: tcumming@csu.edu.au

JENNIFER SUMSION is Foundation Professor of Early Childhood Education at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, Australia, and Co-Director of the Australian government-funded Excellence in Research in Early Years Education Collaborative Research Network. She has a long-standing research interest in the possibilities and politics of early childhood professional practice.

*Contact author
Article Six

Early childhood educators’ experiences in their work environments: Shaping (im)possible ways of being an educator?

TAMARA CUMMING  
Charles Sturt University (Australia)

The purpose of this article is to explore the complex interrelations between educators’ work environments and their experiences as an entryway for thinking differently about workforce stability and sustainability. Concepts of macro- and micropolitics (drawn from the work of Deleuze and Guattari) are used to explore one educator’s experiences in her work environment through readings of visual, textual and affective data. These readings are then used as prompts for thinking differently about the complexity of educators’ experiences in their work environments, and for generating other possibilities for supporting workforce stability and sustainability.

Introduction

The stability and sustainability of the early childhood workforce is critical to the achievement of policy goals in many national contexts – including the Australian context. Despite efforts to address early childhood workforce stability (i.e. the reduction of turnover and attrition of educators – Gable, Rothrauff, Thomburg & Mauzy, 2007) and sustainability (i.e. maintaining numbers of educators, their wellbeing and capacity over the long term) these challenges appear entrenched. Research concerned with workforce challenges such as these has identified some of the complex aspects of work environments that have impacts for educators’ experiences. For example, it appears that for some educators, experiences relating to cultures in work environments (The Social

Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education  
Volume 12 (2015), Number 1 • pp. 52-66

52
Research Centre, 2014), pay and conditions (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011), dominant discourses (Osgood, 2010) or disillusionment (Noble & MacFarlane, 2005) may contribute to whether they stay or leave a work environment (turnover), or the sector altogether (attrition). However, in line with Sumison’s (2007, p. 318) contention that: “researchers... have been slow to address in theoretically or conceptually innovative ways the staffing challenges faced by the ECEC sector”, few studies have focused upon ways that educators experience and negotiate aspects of contextual complexity. Might exploring these ideas help to generate new insights that could assist in better addressing challenges to workforce stability and sustainability?

As an entryway for thinking differently about these challenges, the purpose of this article is to draw on one beginning educator’s (pseudonym ‘Lara’) experiences of negotiating the complexity of her work environment. To do this, concepts including macro- and micro-politics (based on Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking) have been utilised to read relations between Lara’s experiences and her work environment, and what these exchanges produce. The readings of (im)possible ways of being an educator produced through these exchanges are then used as prompts for thinking differently about workforce stability and sustainability.

The article begins with details of the Australian early childhood workforce context, then moves to a brief review of research concerned with educators’ work environments – including organisational, relational and discursive elements. Next come details of key concepts put to work in the article, and of the research study from which data read in this article were generated. This is followed by an outline of the analytic strategies used to generate readings of Lara’s experiences, then, the readings themselves. The article concludes with possibilities for ongoing thinking about workforce stability and sustainability, and suggestions for continued enquiry and action.

The Australian early childhood workforce context

Supporting workforce stability and sustainability is critical to the effectiveness of early childhood education policy across many national contexts (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2014). However, over a long period, efforts to improve early childhood workforce stability have had limited success (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). In order to generate new possibilities, research and policy attention now appears to be shifting to a focus on improving the sustainability of the workforce (see for example, Sumison, 2007; Standing Committee on Education and Early Childhood [SCSEEC], 2012). In the Australian context, this discourse of workforce sustainability underpins a range of workforce measures that are part of the large-scale reform of Australia’s early childhood education sector. This reform agenda includes the development and implementation of a new quality assessment and ratings systems, national early childhood curriculum guidelines and a multi-faceted strategy for workforce development (Department of Education [DE], 2014). These initiatives are part of an extensive agenda that has nationalised the previously fragmented approaches of Australia’s federal government and eight state and territory jurisdictions.
As part of these initiatives, measures to increase educators' qualifications and their professional status (SCSEEC, 2012) have been connected to the development of a "sustainable, highly qualified and professional workforce" (SCSEEC, 2012, p. 3). However (as discussed in detail elsewhere – (Cumming, Sumion & Wong, 2015) the narrow focus of these measures may mean they will have limited success. In addition, there are few signs that the current Australian Federal Government will fund additional targeted measures to support workforce retention (Productivity Commission, 2014). Yet, the critical role of the early childhood workforce in the success of the reform agenda remains – indicating the importance of generating ways of better supporting and sustaining it.

Research review

Research concerned with challenges to workforce stability and sustainability has identified a range of interrelated aspects of work environments that seem to have impacts on educators’ experiences. In a study conducted in 13 classroom in the United States, for example, researchers noted that: “low salaries, lack of benefits, and difficult working conditions” (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011, p. 2) seemed to contribute to low morale, stress and a “compromised organizational climate” (p. 3). In addition, unsatisfactory relationships with colleagues, or feeling professionally isolated (Noble & Macfarlane, 2005) seemed to contribute to turnover, particularly among university-qualified educators (Gable et al., 2007; Cassidy et al., 2011). Data from a recent early childhood workforce census in Australia have also indicated that factors such as culture and job stress may contribute to educators’ decisions to change work environments, or to leave the field altogether (The Social Research Centre, 2014).

There also seem to be a number of organisational and relational aspects that play a role in supporting or undermining educators’ “ability to apply their knowledge and skills” (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011, p. 6) in their work environments. Among these aspects are: the amount of support (and the uniformity of support) among owners, managers and leaders for educators’ professional development and paid planning time; opportunities for educators to make pedagogical decisions individually and collaboratively; and, action to support the financial, physical and mental well-being of educators (Sumion, 2004; Whitebook & Ryan, 2011).

Research has also identified a range of effects for educators relating to the “discursive landscape” of their work environments (Osgood, 2010). These ‘landscapes’ may be shaped by dominant discourses that (for example) circulate to make certain ways of practising in work environments acceptable or unacceptable. Sumion (2001) and Hard (2006) for example, discuss ways that workplace violence (in the form of alienation, repression and neglect based on perceptions of difference) can affect educators’ self-esteem, and their capacity to practice professionally. Similarly, in a South

---

1 In Australia, all staff working directly with children are referred to as ‘educators’, regardless of their qualifications.
Korean study conducted by Kim (2004), educators were ostracised by colleagues on the basis of their level of qualifications (that is, gained through vocational or university institutions). These experiences were reported to have contributed to some participants’ decisions to leave the early childhood sector.

At the same time, there are also indications in research studies of aspects of work environments that support stability and sustainability. For example, one German study with over 460 respondents indicated that educators’ job satisfaction was strongly associated with having a “sense of community and [the] quality of leadership” (Kusma, Groneberg, Nienhaus, & Mache, 2012, p. 197). Another study, with seven educators in the Australian context, indicated that educators’ resilience was supported by working in an environment consistent with their own philosophies and commitment to early childhood education (Sumson, 2004).

The research reviewed here indicates some of the potentially generative connections between aspects of educators’ work environments and experiences, and workforce sustainability. In order to expand on these possibilities, yet keeping in mind Sumson’s (2007) call for more innovative approaches, I take a post structural perspective drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, to explore relations between educators and their work environments. In the next section of the article I outline the concepts I have put to work in readings of ‘Lara’s’ experiences of her work environment.

Concepts for rethinking

Macro- and micropolitics

The concepts I have used to explore relations between educators and their work environments draw from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). The first of these concepts is that of macro- and micropolitics. The concept of the macro and micro is often associated with sociological categories used to differentiate large-scale structures (such as governments) from individual agency (May, 2005). However, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 231) contend that “there is no opposition between the central and the segmentary”, writing instead about macro- and micropolitics as forces or flows, that act to regularise or stabilise (macro-political forces), or to disrupt and reorganise (micro-political forces). Further, they contend that all societies and individuals have macro- and micropolitics that “coexist and cross over into each other” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 235) in constant exchanges. Drawing on these understandings then, relations between work environments and educators might be conceptualised as exchanges of regularising and disrupting forces that work to produce change.

Other researchers using Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts (including macro- and micropolitics) have indicated the possibilities that they have enabled for “previously unthought questions, practices, and knowledge” (Mazzei & McCoy, 2010, p. 504). Olsson (2009) for example, used Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts to re-energise possibilities for movement and experimentation in educators’ practice. Pacini-Ketchabaw (2013) rethought the concept of ‘transitions’ in early childhood practice by using Deleuze and
Guattari’s concepts to explore spaces between-times. Using concepts of macro- and micropolitics to rethink relations between educators and work environments may then also generate new thinking and possibilities for thinking differently about workforce sustainability.

Being an educator

Another concept (drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari) that I use in this article is ‘being’—particularly as part of the term ‘ways of being an educator’. This term is used to convey a conceptualisation of being as a momentary part of a constant process of becoming. Becoming is understood here as a “threshold” space, a state of being in-between where we have been, and where we may go (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 264). According to these ways of thinking about being and becoming, subjects are not seen as constant identities, or as operating from particular positions, but: “assembled... in continuous and continuously transforming relation with the world” (Olsson, 2009, p. 45). These “processes of arranging, organising, and fitting together” (Livesey, 2010, p. 18) in which subjects are produced are what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call assemblages. These are “complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories, that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning” (Livesey, 2010, p. 18). The ways macro- and micropolitical flows operate between these elements can change the capacity of the elements to act in enabling or constraining ways.

Details of the research study

The data I draw upon in this article were generated through a research study conducted in late 2012 and early 2013. The study explored educators’ ways of negotiating complexity in early childhood practice in the Australian context. This question emerged from an interest in how educators might go about navigating the extensive changes affecting their sector. Ten participants took part, all women, and working in a variety of settings in the state of New South Wales (Australia’s most populous state). Seven participants were employed in centre-based settings, three were (respectively): working in an individual child’s home, in a mobile playgroup setting, or, studying to enter another part of the education sector.

For the purposes of the research study (from which data for this article were drawn), the research question was framed as being concerned with ways participants negotiated mixed messages (defined as contradictory ideas about ways of doing and being in early childhood settings). Enquiry around this question involved four phases. In phase one, an initial focus group discussion was conducted, centring upon participants’ experiences of negotiating mixed messages in practice. In phase two, participants generated visual materials extending on ideas generated in the first focus group. In phase three, I held individual research conversations with each participant. Each conversation worked with the participant’s visual materials, as well as ideas about negotiating mixed messages generated during the initial focus group. Phase four
involved a follow-up focus group discussion. Each discussion expanded upon the data regarding ways of negotiating mixed messages that had been generated through the original focus group, visual materials and research conversations. I also shared with participants some of my early analysis of the data, and participants also used these readings as the basis for discussion (see Cumming & Sumson, 2014 for more detail).

Readings of visual, textual and affective data in this article centre around ‘Lara’ (a pseudonym) - an educator working in a long day care centre\(^2\) in Sydney, Australia. Lara had completed a teaching degree (qualifying her to work with children aged birth-12 years) in the year prior to the research study. In her first year of being an educator Lara had already progressed to become a room leader of the preschool age room, and deputy director of the 65 place centre\(^3\). Lara had entered her first teaching position with a sense of optimism and excitement, and a desire to make a difference. As the readings (below) of her experiences show however, her desired way of being an educator met with forces she had not anticipated, and she struggled to maintain a space for being different and effecting change.

*Analytic strategies*

To identify data fragments, and to read connections between Lara and her work environment, I used a process Deleuze described as “reading intensively” (1995, p. 8). In this type of reading: “something comes through or it doesn’t. There’s nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging in to an electric circuit...” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 8). Reading intensively involves reading for affect – moments of intensity in which the capacity of a body (human or other-than-human) to act is changed. An example of affect in research data could be a research participant reporting ways that others’ behaviours or choices make a range of other things more or less possible. It is this sense of a shift of possibilities in a text (of any form) that provides an affective alert when reading intensively (see Cumming, 2014 for more details).

Accordingly, the data I drew upon for the readings in this article came through moments of intensity as I read, and re-read the textual, affective, and visual data generated through my research project (moments of intensity are indicated for readers with bold type in quotes throughout the article). The shifts between possibilities and (seeming) impossibilities in Lara’s accounts had particular resonance for my interest in ways educators negotiating complexity in early childhood practice. Hence this article

\(^2\) Long day care centres are usually open between the hours of 7:30am-6pm, for 50 weeks of the year. Children attending may be aged 6 weeks to 5 years. These centres provide a preschool program for children in the year (sometimes two years) prior to attending school.

\(^3\) This experience is common to many university-qualified educators in the Australian context, due to the high demand for educators with these qualifications to meet the government’s commitment to universal access to preschool for all four-year-olds in their year before school (Productivity Commission 2014).
draws on Lara’s experiences of her work environments, along with existing research on educators’ experiences of work environments, the Australian policy context, and concepts drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s work, to generate new possibilities for thinking about workforce stability and sustainability.

Readings

In this part of the article, readings are given to illuminate the questions – how do macro- and micropolitics operate between Lara and her work environment? and, what do the exchanges of these politics produce? There are two parts to the readings. The first part deals with Lara’s experiences of the exchanges of macro- and micropolitical flows on entering her work environment. The second part of the readings deals with the effects produced through the exchanges of macro- and micropolitics that seemed to constrain Lara’s capacity to manifest her preferred way of being an educator.

The readings draw upon visual, textual and affective data generated through the research study. Figure 1 presents the visual collage that Lara made as part of the research study (for readability, I have enlarged the written material in the images and added it alongside Lara’s collage). Figures 2 and 3 were created by me as part of the analytic process. These figures include comments made by Lara in the focus group discussions, and our individual research conversation (identified by reading intensively). Lines have also been added to give a sense of the forces (and effects) that Lara seemed to be conveying.

As the graduation image at the top right of Lara’s collage illustrates, she completed her degree studies with a sense of freshness and excitement. However, entering the work environment produced a number of unexpected effects for Lara. The first of these effects were visceral impacts produced through the meeting of Lara’s way of being an educator (wanting change and difference) and her colleagues (perceived) “set” state of being. Lara conveyed these impacts through her description “BANG”, and of having her creativity “cut off”. Similarly, the gesture and sound effect of a car zooming away (in the quote on the right hand side of Figure 2) indicate her sense of something valued speeding away from her. The visceral quality of these experiences conveys the intensity of the impact for Lara of entering her first early childhood education work environment.

The second unexpected effect for Lara concerned her perceptions of differences between the seemingly ‘set’ ways of being amongst her colleagues in their work environment and her desire for change. For example, her quote (in Figure 2): “we work as we are. We don’t really need change” conveys a sense of the stabilising (or, micropolitical) force in her work environment. Viewing the image of the circle of figures, and listening to Lara’s explanation that she had “just Googled exclusion” to locate it suggested to me that Lara had experienced a sense of ostracism. However, she went on clarify that ‘exclusion’ did not quite convey her experiences, saying: “I think it’s more than exclusion but…its less of being excluded and more that they don’t want to change”. Trying to gain a sense of her experience, I asked Lara: “what would make it possible for you to join the circle?” and she answered:
I don’t want to join the circle because they’re all doing the exact same thing. They don’t want to change. I want all of them to get some colour and not be closed off. I see it as a group of people blocking the way for change - facing out. (fragment from research conversation)

The difference that Lara perceived (and seemed to desire) was what Deleuze described as “difference in itself”, or, “the particularity or ‘singularity’ of each individual thing, moment, perception or conception” (Stagoll, 2010, p. 74). That is, Lara was not defining her way of being as ‘different from’ the others, nor was it her perception that they were excluding her. Rather, her desired way of being an educator was to have the capacity to move and to change, or, to work in micropolitical ways.

![Figure 1. Lara’s visual collage](image)

1. Unexpected (and) constraining effects

Despite this apparent desire for ‘difference’, over time, exchanges of macro- and micropolitical flows between herself and her colleagues had a third unexpected and constraining effect for Lara:
Facilitator*: ...if you are challenged and there are consequences, how do you feel ...if you aren’t comfortable with them?

Lara: Really constricted...because you can’t do what you think you should be doing, so you’re kind of always watching what you’re doing, if that makes sense?

F: And how do you – what sort of emotion – you’re saying constricted, you’re saying frustrated, but, how do you actually feel about that?

L: I don’t know. You get boxed in... You feel like you can’t do the changes that you want and you have other changes forced on you that you don’t want. (fragment from initial focus group discussion)

“...so you're different, and everybody else is kind of the same, and there’s not really any room for you to get in there, because it’s kind of like “Well we work as we are. We don’t really need change.”

“it’s like BANG...you're going to have to change to us... because we’re set in our ways and that’s how it’s been”.

“...it’s very hard when you walk out, you walk in somewhere and they go ‘No you can’t do those changes, this is how we’re doing it and you can’t do that’ and you’re like, ‘oh my creativity that I just spent 4 years developing just got cut off’.

“and then you move here... this is how I feel about coming into the industry”

“So this is graduation here...”

“when you look at it when you first make the collage, it’s the first one on there – it’s the start fresh - ...and the next thing you know it is gone. That fresh feeling, that excited feeling – ‘Oh my God I made it, I get to make change’ - will go...” (L makes the sound of a car zooming past, along with a hand gesture to show this).

Lara’s sense of being “constricted”, “boxed in”, and of having “changes forced on [her]” that she did not want, convey her sense of frustration and constraint. The exchanges of macro- and micropolitical flows within Lara’s work environment also produced a sense of compulsion to modulated her own behaviour via self-surveillance – “always watching what you’re doing” - to fit in with others’ preferred ways of doing and being. In this way, it seemed that Lara had been forced to exchange her preferred way of operating in micropolitical ways for enacting the regulating and stabilising forces of ‘the same’.

4 An expert focus group facilitator was used to guide the discussion for the first of the two initial focus group discussions. As a result of this guidance and mentoring, the author took on more of the main group facilitation in subsequent group discussions.
1. (Im)possible ways of being an educator?

As the forces of ‘the same’ in her work environment continued to collide with her desire for change, Lara’s capacity for manifesting her preferred ways of being an educator seemed to be diminishing. Two of Lara’s comments about the circle image overlapping the graduation image (see Figure 3) illustrate this point: “...it’s gotten to the point [that] it’s already soiled. I don’t think you can peel this [the circle image] off it [the graduation image] now”, and, “can you stop that there [the overlapping]? Because if it goes any further, I’m gone.”

With these comments in mind, in the follow-up focus group (conducted about a month after our interview), I asked Lara to think again about her experiences:

Q: See how the graduation photo is tucked underneath? Do you feel like that’s disappearing?

“...it’s gotten to the point, like I don’t know if you can ...it’s already soiled. I don’t think you can peel this [the circle image] off it now.”
Lara makes a hand gesture as if peeling back the circle image from the graduation image.

Q: So it’s a matter of managing how much space maybe that’s going to take up? You can’t get rid of it completely but how far can you stop it from encroaching?

“Yeah like ‘can you stop that there? Because if it goes any further, I’m gone.’”

“...technology is the main thing that’s changing. I know regulations and all that have all changed, but the main thing that changes in our generation and will change in the next generation is technology – technological advances”

Q: Some of these images are over the top of each other... “I was trying not to block out things but I wanted to show technology [at] the front, and this one just behind it, because [even though] this is an outdated sense of punishment that has been phased out, children still get made to write lines at school...the fact that that still goes on – it’s because they’re not willing to change – they’re not willing to try.”

“...things like this – they may work but that doesn’t mean that it’s not going to change.”

“so I can still make this part good [what comes after the circle image]... but that part’s gone.”
T: ...Lara I think that was your term – feeling constricted and boxed in by what choices might be available in a setting. Does anything else come to mind with that?

Lara: I just, I think that a lot of the movement, it all comes back to being constricted because you may bend but then something will just bring you straight back. So it's a lot of “I'll try this, I'll try this, I'll try this” and then, in the end it's like “Why try it? Because I'm just going to come back to point A”. (fragment from follow-up focus group discussion)

Although there was a sense of movement in Lara’s account – an elastic stretching-out, or bending-towards as she tried things out - “I'll try this, I'll try this, I'll try this”... she perceived that her attempts to do things differently – to be different - were ultimately shut down by the constant repetition of movements assembling her into the same. At this point, the effects of the macropolitical forces in Lara’s work environment seemed unavoidable. However, just as Deleuze and Guattari contend, it is micropolitics that “makes it or breaks it” (1987, p. 244), Lara retained a sense of other possibilities with which it seemed she could move on. This was evident as she referred to the lower part of her collage (see Figure 3), for example, indicating that although “that part’s gone” (her feelings on completing her degree), she could “still make this part good” (the lower part of the collage).

The three images in the lower part of Lara’s collage juxtapose elements of the embryonic, futuristic and anachronistic. Lara had placed the images of the iPad tiny and calculator to overlap the image of the circle – just as the iPad tiny was placed to encroach on the dunce cap image. As she pointed out, “things like this [the dunce cap image] – they may work but that doesn’t mean that it’s not going to change”. Lara saw technology, and willingness to embrace the possibilities offered by technology, as the main drivers for change in her generation of educators, and for the next. In this way, the lower part of the collage – and its futuristic focus - appeared to be a space through which Lara anticipated that she could reanimate her micropolitical capacity for producing preferred ways of being an educator.

Possibilities

As Olsson (2009, p. 27) suggests: “When the conditions for thinking are changed..., there are possibilities to think, speak and live in ways that are not already known”. In the same way, the use of concepts of macro- and micropolitics to read Lara’s experiences has enabled a variety of “previously unthought” (Mazzei & McCoy, 2010, p. 504) possibilities. Firstly, thinking about “ideas, fragments, theory, selves, sensations” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 262) via the readings of visual, affective and textual data, has enabled readings of being, and the shaping of being, that might not otherwise have become possible. “In particular, these readings have enabled conceptualisations of ways educators’ subjectivities are shaped that are not reliant on dominant humanist conceptualisations of educators as autonomous, and independent from the environment in which they act” (Cumming & Sumson, 2014). Rather, Lara’s entanglement in the exchanges of macro- and micropolitics of her work environment, her meldings of
images, words, senses, technology, gestures, relationships, past, present, and hopes for the future, convey some of the complex interrelations of elements implicated in shaping an educator's subjectivity.

The readings of the effects for Lara of her entanglements in macro- and micropolitical exchanges also contribute to existing literature concerned with effects of work environments on other educators. For example, the readings confirm observations of factors such as cultures and stress in work environments having significant impacts on educators (The Social Research Centre, 2014). In addition, the readings echo some conclusions made by Gable et al. (2007) and Cassidy et al. (2011). Lara's experiences resonated for example, with conclusions drawn regarding the difficulties for university-qualified educators of feeling professionally isolated (Gable et al., 2007). Similarly to Cassidy et al. (2011), the readings of Lara's experiences also made visible some of the effects that can be produced from the complex interrelatedness of factors in work environments. These effects included Lara's experiences of the visceral impacts of micropolitical forces colliding as she entered her work environment as a beginning educator. These experiences resonate with literature documenting other educators' disillusionments as they began practice (Noble and MacFarlane's, 2005; Sumson, 2004), and with the forms of 'violence' discussed by Hard (2006) and Sumson (2001).

At the same time, taking a theoretically and conceptually innovative approach (such as Sumson, 2007, advocates) has generated new insights regarding the complexity of educators' experiences in work environments. For example, the readings suggest that along with the 'discursive landscapes' identified by Osgood (2006), exchanges of macro- and micropolitical forces seem to be implicated in shaping (un)acceptable ways of practicing, or of being an educator. The readings of Lara's experiences also add another dimension to discussions of what might support educators' resilience (Sumson, 2004) - suggesting that a mismatch of educators' orientations to change can be damaging to their resilience and thriving. Indeed, Lara's sense of being forced to exchange her preferred (micropolitical) way of way operating for her colleagues' stabilising (macropolitical) way, suggests the way that exchanges in educators' work environments can severely constrain their capacity for manifesting change.

It seems then, that making space for multiple ways of being an educator could offer opportunities for the kind of "vital, intense and unpredictable experimentation" (Olsson, 2010, p. 6) that might be both highly generative for children, and, satisfying for educators. Accordingly, conditions within work environments (such as highlighted by Kusma et al. 2012; and Fenech et al., 2010), as well as those of policy, educational and regulatory environments (ILO, 2014), need to align with a goal of supporting workforce stability and sustainability. An implication of these readings then, is the need for recognition of the value of making (and keeping) opportunities open for practices of possibilities (such as Lara seemed to desire). In relation to work environments for example, recognising ways macropolitical forces may be constraining possibilities, or ways that educators successfully negotiate change might support efforts to keep space open for these practices.
In relation to approaches to policy making, conditions of possibility could include "...spaces for political action that recognise and generate localised responses, whilst at the same time engendering policy that enables more broadly based social justice" (Press and Skattebol, 2007, p.180). In addition, funding commitments to support these goals must be sustained across time (Brennan and Adamson, 2014). This proposition has particular resonance for the Australian context, where, as of 2015, subsidies of fees for (some) educators' degree or vocational education courses, introduced by the previous federal government as part of the Early Years Workforce Strategy (SCSEE, 2012) will be discontinued (DE, 2014). In addition, it seems possible that ideological differences between Australia’s major political parties regarding the purpose of early childhood education (as EITHER a mechanism to support women’s workforce participation OR the right of all children) may create new fragmentations (Institute of Early Childhood, 2014).

Closing thoughts

In this article using the concepts of macro- and micropolitics has helped make visible some of the complex exchanges between an educator and her work environment, and the constraining and enabling effects of these exchanges. The readings of Lara’s experiences also gesture to the need for conditions of possibility to be fostered in work environments, both in terms of educators’ practice, and their capacity to shape productive ways of being. By making and keeping these spaces open, educators’ resilience and capacity for enabling change might be better supported.

At the same time as conditions of possibility need to be enabled in work environments, sustained government attention and action is also needed. In particular, action concerning the remuneration and conditions commensurate with the skills, knowledge and value of early childhood educators is needed to sustain their capacity to remain in the sector. Additionally, policy, educational and regulatory environments (ILO, 2014) need to be orientated to creating and maintaining conditions that support workforce stability and sustainability. By creating the conditions in which educators thrive, conditions will be enabled for families, the economy, and for children to thrive.

References


64


65


**Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge and thank 'Lara', whose courage and capacity for being difference-in-itself continues to inspire me. I also gratefully acknowledge and thank the anonymous reviewers of this article, along with Prof. Jennifer Sumison and Dr Sandie Wong, for their insightful, critical feedback.

**About the Author**

Tamara Cumming is a researcher and lecturer in early childhood studies at Charles Sturt University, Australia. Tamara’s research interests focus on the early childhood workforce. Her recently completed doctoral thesis was concerned with making visible the complexity of early childhood practice, and educators’ ways of negotiating this complexity. Her other interests include poststructural theory, interprofessional work, and workforce sustainability. Tamara can be contacted at tcumming@csu.edu.au.

© Copyright 2015. The author, TAMARA CUMMING, assigns to the University of Alberta and other educational and non-profit institutions a non-exclusive license to use this document for personal use and in courses of instruction provided that the article is used in full and this copyright statement is reproduced. The author also grants a non-exclusive license to the University of Alberta to publish this document in full on the World Wide Web, and for the document to be published on mirrors on the World Wide Web. Any other usage is prohibited without the express permission of the authors.
Postscript to Part 4

Articles 4, 5 and 6 contribute a number of insights to the research question: How do educators in Australia negotiate complexity in early childhood practice? The first insight concerns the elaboration of key concepts underpinning the research question. For example, readings of data included in these articles give some insight into the nature of the ‘complexity’ that ‘educators in Australia negotiate’. Complexity is shown to be at work as ever-changing combinations and interrelations of elements such as people, places, sensations and discourses. Similarly, concepts of ‘early childhood practice’ in the research question have been expanded via the idea of practice assemblages – through whose combined forces and capacities change happens in early childhood settings.

The concept of practice assemblages also gestures to ways of thinking differently about the shaping of educators’ subjectivities. Rather than conceptualising educators’ subjectivities according to discourses (such as professionalism), or, as autonomous, always-agentic individuals, the readings of data offered in the articles suggest ways that educators’ subjectivities are negotiated within conditions of possibility. These conditions are produced through exchanges of macro- and micro-political forces – between colleagues, within a work environment, with families, with children, and with policy and regulatory bodies. Educators’ ways of negotiating complexity can therefore be understood as part of combined forces and capacities that produce change, but which can also produce more and less possible ways of being an educator.

A second area of insights concerns the ways of negotiating complexity made visible through the readings of data. Some of the ways educators’ negotiated dominant discourses confirmed those noted in the interpretative meta-analysis (Article 2), such as the example in Article 4, of an educator consciously fitting herself into sanctioned territories of child-centredness. New insights also arose from making visible educators’ ways of negotiating ‘less tangible’ aspects of practice, including combinations of the relational, visceral and sensory as especially evident in Article 5. In this way, educators’ ways of negotiating complexity have been shown to include cognitive and affective elements, which work together through practice assemblages to affect change.

A third way the articles illuminate the research question is in relation to the politics of complexity. While the combined forces and capacities of practice assemblages bring about change in early childhood settings, exchanges of macro- and micro-political forces between
an educator and other elements – such as work environment – can enable or diminish capacities for negotiating complexity. Moreover, exchanges of micro- and macro-political forces through in-between spaces of imperceptibility can (as discussed in Article 5) produce less desirable subjectivities, and limited possibilities, for some educators. Therefore, whilst complexity in early childhood practice is an always-moving force, this force does not always produce desirable effects for educators.

In the following and final part of the thesis – the Conclusion – I draw out the contributions made by the study as a whole to existing literature and policy debates. I then outline possible implications of the study for practice, policy and methodological approaches. I also offer a number of possible research directions that extend upon insights arising from the research, then make concluding comments.
Part Five:

A closing
A Closing

The research project reported in this thesis has investigated the question: *How do educators in Australia negotiate complexity in early childhood practice?* Part 4 of the thesis outlined a number of new insights generated through the research project. This concluding section now identifies contributions of the project as a whole to existing research literature and policy documents. It also suggests implications of the project for thinking differently about educators’ subjectivities, for pre-service education, for supporting and sustaining the early childhood workforce, and for the use of rhizomatic methodologies in educational research. I conclude with suggestions for four possible future research directions, and thoughts concerning educators’ ways of negotiating complexity.

**Contributions of the project to existing research literature**

My discussion of contributions to existing research literature is framed according to two areas of insight arising from the project. The first area is making visible the complexity of early childhood practice; a second area is making visible educators’ ways of negotiating complexity.

1. **Making visible the complexity of early childhood practice**

A key contribution of the project is the elaboration of the often taken-for-granted refrain of ‘the complexity of early childhood educators’ practice’. By putting to work concepts of assemblages, and macro- and micro-political flows, the project made visible elements of the complexity of early childhood practice, and some of the ways that these elements of complexity worked together to produce change. The project therefore contributes further examples to existing research highlighting the complexity of educators’ roles (Raban, Ure, & Waniganayake, 2003), of classroom practices (Hsieh, 2004), and the work of teaching young children (Hatch & Benner, 2011). Although the research project is small in scale, insights arising from the research project expand upon these earlier accounts by focusing on how complexity works, and what effects it produces. In this way, the research project contributes a new way of thinking about early childhood practice as constituted through the ways that elements work together to produce difference and change.

The project also contributes to the research literature concerning the politics of complexity in early childhood practice. As examples in Articles 5 and 6 make visible, these politics can produce more and less desirable effects for educators. These insights contribute the kind of less “romantic notions of practice” that Noble and MacFarlane (2005, p. 54) and Sumsion
(2003) have suggested may be more helpful in supporting and sustaining the early childhood workforce.

2. **Making visible educators’ ways of negotiating complexity**

Making visible ways that educators negotiate complexity is a second contribution of my project to existing literature concerned with educators’ practice. The focus on *how* educators’ negotiated complexity has, for example, made visible the transformative potential of the micro-politics of early childhood practice. In similar ways that Blaise (2013) and Olsson (2009) made visible through their research then, findings from the research project provide examples of ways that educators’ small reworkings of the everyday (Rose, 1999) can disrupt the often assumed dominance of large-scale macro-political forces (such as policy) over what happens in local settings and interactions.

In addition, the research project makes visible some of the ways educators negotiated complexity. These ways of negotiating included cognitive and relational aspects that are often acknowledged in existing research literature (see for example, Robson & Fumoto, 2009; Widger & Schofield, 2012), as well as those visceral or affective ways that are less recognised. In these ways, insights from the project broaden understandings of ways educators might negotiate complexity beyond the cognitive and relational. At the same time, attention to affective elements of complexity, and how these elements work in combinations with others in practice assemblages, adds a new perspective to literature exploring ‘less tangible’ aspects of educators’ practice (as for example, explored by Krieg, 2011; Goodfellow, 2012).

The project has also demonstrated how some of the methodological challenges of making sense of the complexity evident in educators’ accounts can be addressed by utilising Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts. In this way, insights from the research project contribute to a growing body of research in Australia (for example, Sellers, 2015; Stratigos, 2015) and other national contexts (for example, Angell, 2014; Evans, 2015) concerned with putting to work post-structural thinking to explore, open up and further develop possibilities for educators’ pedagogy.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the ‘sense’ that I have made of educators’ experiences of complexity is partial, and based on readings that necessarily entwine my own interests, concerns and resonances alongside those of the participants. Although these
processes of sense-making are ontologically commensurate with Deleuze and Guattari’s work, they can only be claimed as some of many ways of making sense of complexity.

**Contributions of the project to policy discourses**

Making visible complexity in early childhood practice, and ways educators negotiate complexity, can also contribute to policy discourses. For example, in the Australian context, refrains of the complexity of early childhood practice are evident in policy documents such as the Australian Early Years Workforce Strategy (Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood [SCSEEC], 2012), and underpin the Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF] (DEEWR, 2009) and National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2012). The research project has elaborated on these existing refrains by making visible Australian educators’ experiences of negotiating complexity in their everyday practice, and by conceptualising relations between educators and policy and work environments in innovative ways. By highlighting these openings to complexity across policy documents, and making visible ways policy and educators can be mutually-affecting, insights from the research project could offering educators possibilities for working with these openings to complexity in policy discourses, in their own practice.

**Implications**

I now propose some of the implications arising from investigating educators’ ways of negotiating complexity. Implications are presented in relation to five areas: educators’ subjectivities, approaches to policy making, pre-service education, supporting workforce sustainability, and using rhizomatic methodologies in educational research.

1. **Educator’s subjectivities**

Insights arising from the project have implications for ways of thinking about being an educator – in terms of the shaping of subjectivities, and, dominant discourses of professionalism. In making visible educators’ ways of being in assemblages for example, the project offers a conceptualisation of subjectivities as shaped through the constant exchanges of macro- and micro-political forces. However, the politics of these exchanges challenge ideas that exercising resistance and agency are always possibilities for educators (Ortlipp, Arthur & Woodrow, 2011). Indeed, educators’ capacities for shaping preferred ways of being can be limited by other elements of practice assemblages (such as for Lara in Article 6), just as they can enable the production of preferred ways of being (such as for Vanessa in Article 4).
These are ways of thinking differently about the shaping of educators’ subjectivities that do not rely upon concepts of identity formation (Thomas, 2012), or discourses that are perceived as available to educators (Ortlipp, Arthur & Woodrow, 2011). This is significant insofar as concepts of identity or subject position can limit subjective possibilities (as Olsson, 2009 also argues) to those inhering in particular identities or subject positions – for example, those of teacher or educator (Ortlipp, Arthur & Woodrow, 2011; Gibson, 2013). As I now go on to discuss, these ways of thinking differently about educators’ subjectivities also imply the need for macro- and micro-political forces to actively enable educators to shape preferred subjectivities – through, for example, approaches to policy making, and pre-service education. In addition, action on these suggestions may have, I argue, implications for workforce sustainability.

2. Approaches to policy making

One implication of the project for policy makers and regulatory bodies (particularly in the Australian context) could be to support aspects of quality standards that open space for educators’ negotiation of complexity. Actions that keep open these spaces for complexity in early childhood practice could assist in resisting pressures to revert to more technicist approaches to regulation, which were widely perceived to characterise the operation of Australia’s previous regulatory framework in its final years (Fenech, Sumsion, Robertson, & Goodfellow, 2007).

The new insights into complexity in early childhood practice generated through the research project could also be used to further develop the existing openings to complexity in Australian early childhood education policy documents. Examples of such opportunities could include government-championed recognition of the complexity of educators’ practice, and, promoting ongoing professional learning amongst educators, to support and sustain them in negotiating complexity in their practice. Both of these areas have been identified as priorities in the Early Years Workforce Strategy (SCSEEC, 2012) for example, again, presenting openings to complexity that could be expanded using insights from the research project. Moreover, discourses of complexity in the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2012) currently concern children’s learning, and families’ lives. These could be expanded to explicitly recognise the complexity of educators’ practice.

At the same time, by making visible educators’ ways of negotiating complexity, the research project might inadvertently contribute to the production of new technologies for defining and limiting the possibilities of early childhood practice (as cautioned by Jensen,
Broström & Hansen, 2010 in relation to the Danish context). New technologies could include for example, technico-rationalist agendas specifying and measuring ‘best practice’ in negotiating complexity, that could close off, rather than open out conditions in which possibilities flourish. Policy approaches therefore need to attend to these politics (Dahlberg & Moss, 2012) by balancing regulation with the creation of conditions that enable educators’ ways of negotiating complexity.

A way of balancing needs for regulation and conditions of possibility could be to rethink relations between existing Australian policy documents with concepts such as assemblages and complexity. For example, thinking about the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2012) and the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) as elements in a policy assemblage with educators and work environments, could produce new possibilities. The documents could be read through each other, and in relationship with educators’ experiences – mapped onto each other in the way that Giugni (2011) describes mapping her practice onto key concepts of the EYLF, for example. Possibilities could be enabled for negotiated, professional judgment-oriented practice that also works with key regulatory aspects of the National Quality Standard to produce change.

3. Pre-service education

Insights arising from the research project also highlight the importance of fostering educators’ capacities for negotiating complexity. The politics of complexity made visible through the research project gestured to the capacity of some educators’ for thinking and practising expansively, while others appeared more comfortable adopting a more stabilising approach. Whilst, as Grieshaber (2010) recognises, negotiating complexity is not an easy nor familiar approach for many educators, the possibilities offered by a more open approach to practice seemed to have benefits for supporting and sustaining a number of the educators who participated in the research project. Making visible educators’ ways of negotiating complexity to the field at large, might help others become more open to actively engaging with negotiating complexity, rather than seeking to simplify and stabilise it. This in turn might assist educators to reconceptualise their work and potentially, the rewards they perceive they gain from it.

In addition, insights from my own research project, as well as in existing literature (Krieg, 2010; Hatch & Benner, 2011) suggest that beginning educators may have particular difficulty negotiating complexity. Despite pressures in some contexts, including Australia, for a subject content-focused curriculum to meet the requirements of program accreditation
bodies (Tuinamuana, 2011) it is important that pre-service programs continue to emphasise the integration of theory and practice, and ways of negotiating their sometimes mixed messages. Drawing on examples from Nordic university curricula as discussed by Lenz Taguchi (2007) and Karila (2012), students could be offered opportunities to recognise and reflect upon their negotiation of complexity during their practicum, and to receive ongoing support to further develop and sustain these capacities over time.

4. Supporting workforce sustainability

As reiterated throughout the thesis, meeting the challenge of supporting and sustaining the early childhood workforce has remained elusive across many national contexts – including Australia. Making visible the complexity of early childhood practice offers a number of implications for this seemingly entrenched problem. One possibility might be advocacy for, and dissemination of examples of educators’ experiences of negotiating complexity. This suggestion responds to calls in the Early Years Workforce Strategy (SCSEEC, 2012, p. 9) for the dissemination of “stories and case studies of professional practice” and promoting the “importance, rewards and career opportunities of being an early childhood educator” as a means of “enhancing public perceptions of the [early childhood] profession” (p. 8).

Promoting the complexity of early childhood practice in these ways might also be helpful for attracting educators to the sector who are seeking a career requiring intellectual work as well as care and technical skills (as noted also by Sumsion, 2004). Entering the field with these expectations could potentially minimise the disillusionment of romanticised ideals, or unanticipated complexity, that sometimes seem implicated in educators leaving the field (as reported for example, by Noble & Macfarlane, 2005; Sumsion, 2003). This possibility may be of particular importance in the Australian context, where policy initiatives rely on a consistent supply of these graduates in order to meet objectives (as discussed in Article 1), yet where difficulties recruiting and retaining degree-qualified educators seem intractable.

The interrelatedness of elements of complexity in early childhood practice – including educators, policies, children and parents – made visible through the research project, gestures to the potential value of thinking differently about the concept of workforce sustainability. Anand and Sen’s (1994, n.p.), concept of sustainable human development (emphasis in original) could prove useful in this regard. According to Anand and Sen: “human development is defended as a goal in itself; it directly enhances the capability of people to lead worthwhile lives, so there are immediate gains in what is ultimately important, while safeguarding similar opportunities in the future”. In this way, workforce sustainability can be conceptualised as in the mutual interest of educators, families,
children and national economies (as also discussed in Article 1). Thinking of the sustainability of the early childhood workforce in this way also has implications for discussions of educators’ rights to fair pay and conditions. According to the principles of sustainable human development mentioned above, fair pay and conditions would sustain educators’ wellbeing in an immediate sense, whilst also sustaining their capacity to remain in the workforce and enhance the capability of others.

5. Methodology used in educational research

A fifth area for which the research project has implications concerns the use of rhizomatic methodologies in educational research. As suggested in Articles 3-6, and reiterated above, putting to work ideas from Deleuze and Guattari has been key to making visible the complexity of early childhood practice, and educators’ ways of negotiating complexity. The insights generated through the research project, and the means of their generation through textual, affective and visual processes, show the possibilities afforded by expanding the methodological repertoire available to educational researchers (as also advocated by Coleman & Ringrose, 2013; Webb, 2014).

The use of post-structural approaches to think differently about early childhood education has been criticised on the grounds of relativism and ambiguity (a critique noted by Lenz Taguchi, 2007). However, in light of the complexity of early childhood practice made visible through this research project, I argue that the relativism and ambiguity of post-structural approaches are entirely appropriate for thinking differently about early childhood practice, and, for generating new possibilities to support workforce sustainability. Indeed, using a rhizomatic methodology has made it possible to generate possibilities for addressing the seemingly intractable problems of workforce sustainability.

Caveats

1. Onto-epistemology and dissemination conventions of academic writing

In addition to proposing implications of the research project, I now offer some caveats. Firstly, in relation to methodological considerations, and as I discuss in paper 3, there are ongoing challenges to disseminating examples of thinking differently. One challenge concerns the difficulty of maintaining commensurability between the underpinning onto-epistemology of rhizoanalysis and the conventions concerned with the dissemination of academic writing. For example in relation to Article 1, the journal that had accepted the manuscript required me to use headings consistent with their classification of the article as a ‘case study’. Headings required by the journal (such as “Discussion and evaluation”)
suggested a positivist stance to data – a sense that data are phenomena that may be examined and assessed neutrally. This stance was inconsistent with my own post-structural orientation (informed by the work of Deleuze and Guattari) to things constantly becoming, and to readings of data that are partial and subjective. In accepting the journal’s presentation requirements, was I thereby compromising the onto-epistemological underpinning of my work? Jackson and Mazzei (2013, p. 262) recognised similar problems when using post-structural theory in their own empirical research. They said, for example, that “A recognition of the limits of our received practices does not mean that we reject such practices; instead, we work the limits (and limitations) of such practices”. With this approach in mind, in the case of Article 1 therefore used questions as sub-headings (“A highly qualified workforce?” (p. 17), and “A professional workforce?” (p. 18) as a way of challenging, rather than completely acceding to conventions of journal publication. In this way, I endeavoured to retain some onto-epistemological commensurability with Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis on the constant emergence of things, whilst working the limits, and limitations, (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013) of conventions shaping the dissemination of academic writing.

2. **Human and other-than-human elements of assemblages**

A second caveat to the proposed contributions and implications of my research project concerns human elements of research assemblages. A key part of Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualisation of assemblages is the decentredness of the human subject, and the opportunities afforded by thinking about ways other-than-human elements of assemblages combine and produce change. This thesis, and its constituting elements (Articles, introductions and postscripts and closings), has taken as its focus, ways that educators negotiate complexity. While this focus has enabled a response to an enquiry in a way that attends to the requirements of Doctoral research, to some extent it has minimised attention to the ways other-than-human elements of assemblages are implicated in the complexity of early childhood practice. Some of these other-than-human elements have been acknowledged – for example, regulatory discourses (page 105), and the productive potential of the unknown (page 108), and of emerging digital technologies (p. 136). Nevertheless, further attention could have been given to ways that materials, technologies or spaces (for example) seemed to be implicated in the complexity of early childhood practice.
3. **Arts-based enquiry**

Visual materials seemed to offer participants an other-than-verbal way of expressing their experiences of negotiating complexity. As well as working as “tools for thinking” (Prosser, 200, p. 488) for the participants who produced the visual materials, they also prompted new thinking amongst other participants (such as in relation to Marilyn’s artwork, on page 103). At the same time, it could be argued that visual materials appear secondary to textual materials - in particular transcripts of spoken words – in my analyses and the thesis as a whole. My own comfort and fluency with textual and non-verbal means of communication ahead of visual materials may have contributed to this. Nevertheless, readings of Marilyn’s artwork in Article 4 made visible the complexity of educators’ practice, while readings of Vanessa’s photograph in Article 5 illuminated the productive potential of the imperceptible.

In addition, the processes of the generation of the artworks receive little attention. This is mostly due to the focus on what the visual materials might produce as part of data assemblages rather than on the processes the participants undertook to generate the visual materials. An exception to this was Lara’s account (in Article 6) in which the visual materials and the visceral, past, present and emotional entangled in their making were catalytic in producing readings of (im)possible ways of being an educator. It might be fair to say then, that while the thesis draws upon many readings of written materials, readings of visual materials have also been important to making visible ways that educators negotiated complexity.

**Future research directions**

Throughout my PhD candidature, I have consistently encountered the puzzlement of those not involved with early childhood education at the idea of a PhD focusing on educators themselves. This puzzlement has given me the opportunity to advocate for the complexity of educators’ practice, and has strengthened my conviction of the importance of making this complexity visible. As I now discuss, I hope to continue this work in both my teaching and research activities. I offer four possible research directions: investigating and fostering educators’ capacity for negotiating complexity in early childhood practice; negotiating complexity in inter-professional work; thinking differently about educators’ ways of being with children in practice assemblages; and, exploring micro-political tensions in educators’ workplaces.
1. **Investigating the shaping of educators’ subjectivities within practice assemblages**

As mentioned above, insights arising from the research project gesture to possibilities for reconceptualising ways that educators’ subjectivities are shaped by conditions of possibility, and as part of practice assemblages. Further investigation of the shaping and expression of educators’ subjectivities within practice assemblages could offer immediate and ongoing insights to participating educators. At the same time, implications for larger-scale changes to teacher education and ongoing professional learning could also be generated, along with further implications for supporting workforce sustainability.

2. **Negotiating inter-professional complexity**

Inter-professional work (with speech therapists, child protection officers and social workers, for example) (Wong, Sumson & Press, 2012) is another aspect of complexity in educators’ practice that could be further investigated. Fostering educators’ capacity for inter-professional work has been identified as a priority area in the Australian Early Years Workforce Strategy (SCSEEC, 2012). However, as existing research suggests (Cumming & Wong, 2012; Cartmel, Macfarlane, & Nolan, 2013;), further attention is required to ways issues such as professional hierarchies make it difficult for early childhood educators to work effectively in inter-professional ways with others. In order to generate more sustainable ways of working, a similar approach to that used in my research project could be used to make visible ways that various professionals negotiate complexity in inter-professional practice. The concept of practice assemblages might also prove useful for thinking differently about what could be produced through interrelatedness in inter-professional teams.

3. **Relational assemblages**

Another aspect of complexity in early childhood practice that could be explored further concerns educators’ relationships with children. Possibilities for thinking differently about educators’ ways of being with children and families could follow on from experiences such as Di’s (reported in Article 5), who described a sense of joining her feelings to a child’s feelings to evoke calm. Pelo (2014) has also noted educators’ ways of joining their attention to the child’s attention as a way of generating rich experiences. Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of assemblages (and the concept of practice assemblages) could be a way of exploring these ideas further. New accounts of educators’ ways of being-with children could be generated, along with further insights concerning the subjectivities produced for educators and children through these ways of being-with. This line of enquiry could generate new ways for educators to conceptualise their relationships with infants in
particular, where verbal communication cannot be relied upon as a means of effecting change.

4. Workplace focus

A fourth possible research direction concerns ways that work environments enable or restrict conditions of possibility for educators. As Whitebook and Ryan (2011) have advocated, focused research attention on early childhood workplaces is critical to generating ways of better supporting workforce sustainability. Accordingly, a future project could for example, focus on some of the micro-political tensions concerning hierarchies of qualifications, age and experience that were hinted at in educators’ accounts shared in Articles 4, 5 and 6. An approach drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari could enable insights into ways that these tensions are produced and negotiated, and what effects are produced for educators, and for the work environment as a whole. Insights generated through a project such as this could potentially inform action research with a particular group of educators working together, ongoing professional learning, pre-service education, or perhaps support workforce sustainability.

Concluding thoughts

By exploring educators’ ways of negotiating complexity, the research project reported in this thesis has made visible the complexity of early childhood practice, educators’ capacities for negotiating complexity, and the politics of these negotiations. Openings to complexity and recognition of the negotiated nature of early childhood practice currently remain part of policy documents such as the Australian Early Years Workforce Strategy (SCSEEC, 2012), National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2012) and Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009). However, as in many other national contexts, the changing political climate in Australia will play a major role in how early childhood practice is conceptualised (Logan, Sumption, & Press, under review), and funded (Brennan & Adamson, 2014). Discourses of early childhood education as a workforce participation and productivity strategy are intensifying under Australia’s current, conservative federal government. In this context, conceptualisations of early childhood practice as a technology to meet these predominantly productivity-focussed goals could become dominant.

Sustaining conditions of possibility, and openings to complexity in policy discourses and documents are therefore, important aims for future research. Part of this thinking needs to include ongoing attention to how educators are being supported in the complexity of their practice. Support and sustainability need to be addressed during pre-service education and
ongoing professional learning, as well as through everyday support in work environments, and via policy approaches that make and keep open space for complexity to thrive. However, in keeping with insights from the research project concerning the interrelatedness and mutual affectivity of macro- and micro-politics, keeping conditions of possibility open also requires the recognition of the complexity of educators’ practice by educators themselves, as well as policy makers, the public, and those owning or managing work environments. Recognising the productive potential of complexity in the micro-politics of early childhood practice therefore needs to be matched with macro-political action that also supports and sustains conditions for possibilities to flourish.

References


Appendices
Appendix 1. Invitation to participate

16 September, 2012

Dear Social Justice in Early Childhood Group member

I would like to invite you to participate in my PhD research project, which is about ways that early childhood educators in Australia negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing their practice. I am looking for about 15 participants from across NSW, who are working as educators (with any or no qualifications), or as directors in children’s services. To find out more about my project, and how you could be involved, please read through the full information statement attached to this email message.

If you would like more information about the project, please don't hesitate to email me with any questions or concerns. Or, if you would like to take part, please reply to me by email: tcumming@csu.edu.au by September 30, 2012. I will then contact you by email about a suitable location and time for you to join in one of the focus groups, and to ask for some basic details about your experience. Please note, I will ask you to sign a formal consent to participate at the first focus group meeting.

Many thanks for your time!

Tamara Cumming

PhD Student

Charles Sturt University
Appendix 2. Participant details

Group 1

‘Esther’

Esther has worked in the early childhood sector for over 20 years in long day care centres and occasional care. At the time of the study she was working in a large regional city providing in-home care to children. Esther was qualified at diploma level and was undertaking degree studies in early childhood teaching. Esther had a hearing impairment (she identified as deaf), wore hearing aids, and signed using Australian Sign Language (Auslan). She joined the research study via the email invitation posted on CSU early childhood education subject forums.

‘Kerry’

Kerry had been working in the sector for 34 years, most of this as the director of a multi-purpose children’s centre (providing pre-school, long day care, occasional care and supported playgroup services from one setting) in a regional area. Kerry was qualified at degree level in early childhood teaching, and was also undertaking degree level studies in business administration. She joined the research study via an email invitation circulated through the Association of Community Childcare Services [ACCS] (New South Wales state branch).

‘Kelly’

Kelly had been working in the sector for less than a year, having graduated with her degree in early childhood education the previous year. She had worked briefly in a primary school, and was working in a regional long day care centre as the room leader of a 0-18 month room. Kelly joined the research study via an invitation from Lara.

‘Lara’

Lara had been working in the sector for a year, having graduated with her degree in early childhood education the previous year. She had also worked as a child development officer for a family day care scheme and vacation care. Lara was the room leader of the two-three year old room, and second in charge in a long day centre in Sydney. She joined the research study via the email invitation circulated through ACCS.

‘Vanessa’
Vanessa had been working in the sector for 20 years, in long day care and preschool services. She had also undertaken consulting to early childhood services, and had taught at university and in vocational education and training colleges. Vanessa was qualified at degree level and was working at a preschool in Sydney. She joined the research study via an email invitation circulated through the Social Justice in Early Childhood group.

Participants in Group 2

‘Di’

Di was a room leader of a birth-two years room at a community-based long day care centre in Sydney, where she had been working for under a year. Di had moved to Australia in 2007 from South Africa, where she had been a primary school teacher. After arriving in Australia, she completed diploma-level studies, and has since worked with under-three years groups in long day care centres. Di joined the research study via the email invitation circulated through ACCS.

‘Lyn’

Lyn was an educator working in the same birth-2 years room as Di, and had been working at this long day care centre for 17 years. She had worked at another centre operated by the same organisation for 8 years, as well as in other long day care and vacation care services. Lyn had moved to Australia from New Zealand, and had qualified at diploma level in Australia. Lyn joined the research study via the email invitation circulated through ACCS.

‘Monica’

Monica had worked in the early childhood sector for 30 years, and for the previous 8 years had been working at the same long day care centre as Lyn and Di (though not at the same time as Di). Monica had moved to Australia from New Zealand, and was qualified at degree level. Monica had been working in the sector for 30 years until 2011, when she returned to study for a Masters Degree in teaching English to adults. Monica joined the research study via an invitation from Lyn.

‘Marilyn’

Marilyn was working as the director of a long day care, a role she had been in for about nine months. She had been working in the early childhood sector for 34 years, beginning as...
a cook, then after completing diploma level studies, as an educator and administrator. Marilyn also held a Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts), and had provided art programmes based on the Reggio Emilia philosophies to children’s services. Marilyn joined the research study via the email invitation sent out through ACCS.

‘Sharlene’

Sharlene had been coordinating and operating mobile children’s services for the previous 9 years, and prior to this, had worked in long day care, preschool, occasional and in-home care for two years. Sharlene was qualified at diploma level and at the time of the study was undertaking degree studies in early childhood teaching. She joined the research study via the email invitation posted on CSU early childhood education subject forums.
Appendix 3. Focus Group Questions

1) Do you ever get mixed messages about ‘right’ ways of being, thinking or doing your work in early childhood education?
   - If you do, where do those messages come from?

2) What is it like to experience these types of mixed messages?
   - What feelings can it bring up?
   - Are there things you feel you should say or think, even though you would prefer not to?
   - Are there things you feel you shouldn’t say or think, even though you would like to? (If so, can you give some examples of these things?)

3) How would you describe your response when you experience mixed messages?
   - For example, do you give priority to some ways of being, thinking or doing?
   - Do you ever try to disrupt or resist these messages about ‘right’ ways to do, think or be?

4) What choices have you seen yourself as having?
   - How did you come to these choices?
   - How did you decide on a response?

5) What have been some of the consequences - for yourself and for others?
Appendix 4. Notes for participants

18 February, 2013

Dear,

I have prepared the following notes to give you some background information for our focus group discussion. Can you please read through them, along with the focus group questions, before we meet? There is no need to make, or bring notes with you, this material is just to give you an idea of what we might talk about, and to prompt reflection.

Mixed messages and discourses

In our focus group, I would like hear about your experiences of recognising and responding to ‘mixed messages’ about ‘right’ ways of being, thinking or doing your work in early childhood education.

Mixed messages can come about when different ‘discourses’ are at work. Discourses are ways of thinking and speaking about particular things (e.g., early childhood practice). Through discourses, we come to see and understand the ‘thing’ in particular ways, and sometimes, in limited ways.

French philosopher Michel Foucault (b.1927- d.1984) wrote a lot about discourses. He would say that discourses shape early childhood practice by (for example) giving messages about ‘right’ ways to be a professional in early childhood education.

Different discourses (e.g., about quality, regulation, risk, professionalism, care, social justice) give different messages, and sometimes these discourses are contradictory. Translated into early childhood practice, this can mean that early childhood educators sometimes have to negotiate mixed messages about the ‘right’ way to be, think or do things.

Foucault also argued that some discourses are dominant, in that they tend to overshadow other discourses. But he also believed that it was possible to resist and reshape discourses. If Foucault was right, then we probably have more scope to make informed choices about our approaches and our actions than dominant discourses and messages seem to suggest.

Preparing for the focus group

Ahead of our discussion, can you please reflect on some times that you may have experienced ‘mixed messages’ about ‘right’ ways of being, thinking or doing your work in early childhood education? For example, there might have been experiences you had within a workplace; while you were studying and working; or as you completed study and began working. Other times that mixed messages become apparent can be when new theories become popular in the field, when rules or governments (or both!) change, as new staff come and go, or as your life experiences are affirmed or challenged in your practice with children and families.

As you think of a situation, you might like to consider what mixed messages you got about ‘right’ ways of being, thinking or doing, where you think they might have come from, and how you have responded. For example, can you think of specific examples of some of the strategies you used?
Did you feel you had a choice about how you responded? What were some of the reasons that you responded as you did? What were some of the consequences?

An example from my experience

Here is a reflection on my own experiences of ‘mixed messages’ to give you an idea...

I started my first job in early childhood education as an ‘untrained’ childcare worker in a preschool. This preschool was in a wealthy area, and some of the staff were very ‘old school’ in their attitudes. Our director was not ‘old school’ though, she was really into anti-bias curriculum, and always looking for ways to introduce social justice. This didn’t go down especially well with the parents, who couldn’t understand why their children would need to know about Aboriginal culture (for example), and it didn’t go down very well with the ‘old school’ staff who thought the director was being too politically correct. I felt really stuck in the middle, because I found the director hard to get on with, but I agreed with some of her ideas, and I found it easier to get on with the other staff, but didn’t agree with some of their ideas. I felt like if I tried to take up opportunities to ask provocative questions with children (talking with them about power or gender for example) the others thought I was ‘on the director’s side’, but if I just kept my head down and didn’t do the work in ways I believed in, I felt really hollow and anxious. I was trying to balance up my own desire to belong in the team, and in a profession that was new to me, with the desire to ‘do’ early childhood practice in ways that seemed ‘right’ to me – that fit with my values about early childhood education, and what I believed we as educators were there to do. I felt a bit trapped between mixed messages about what were the ‘right’ ways to do, think and be within this setting, as well as in the profession generally. As I didn’t find the support or resources that might have helped me, I really struggled to resolve these tensions, and in the end, I left.

Although my strategy here was withdrawal (and in a way it’s a ‘negative’ story), please don’t feel that your examples have to be negative. As you are still working in the field and / or studying to upgrade your qualifications, I anticipate that you might have found successful strategies for negotiating mixed messages and the discourses that inform them. I am particularly interested in hearing about strategies that have ‘worked’ for you.

Some housekeeping about the focus group

Our group discussion is due to begin at 11am on Saturday, February 23. I would greatly appreciate it if you could arrive around 10.45am so that we can be ready to begin on time.

There will be around 5 participants in our focus group, along with myself, and Joy Goodfellow, who will help me facilitate, and make notes about, the group discussion.

The focus group will be held at the CSU Sydney Olympic Park offices, Level 1, Quad 3 Building, 102 Bennelong Parkway, Sydney Olympic Park.

If you are driving to Sydney Olympic Park - please see the map attached. When you enter the driveway at Quad 3 you will see a boom gate on your left, and someone waiting to let you in. Please park in one of the spaces marked ‘CSU’ if possible. Entry to the building is along the path just past the boom gates, please come to level 1.
If you are catching public transport to Sydney Olympic Park – the SOP train station is very close by (about 5 mins walk). Please be aware that the trains do not run frequently to Sydney Olympic Park, but do run more frequently to a nearby station – Concord West. If you are planning on catching the train, and would like a map for the walk to the office from one of these stations please let me know and I will send one to you by email.

If you are running late on the day – please send me a text message to let me know when you expect to arrive – my mobile number is 0438 808 342.

I will have morning tea available beforehand as well as after the group, and if you need to be reimbursed for train or bus fares, we can do this after the group has ended. Please note – to be reimbursed, I must have a receipt with an ABN included on it. I can take a photocopy of any tickets you might need for your return trip.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me with any questions ahead of the group, otherwise I am very much looking forward to meeting you, and hearing your perspectives and experiences!

Sincerely

Tamara Cumming
PhD Student
Appendix 5. Written guide to arts-based phase

23 February 2013

Arts-based data collection stage

NB The following information is the same as that contained in your information statement.

The next stage of the project would involve preparing a visual representation (in your own time) that documents ways you negotiate mixed messages. I am aware that you are likely to have multiple demands on your time apart from your work, and expect that participants might spend from ½ and hour to a few hours creating or selecting a visual ‘artefact’.

This ‘artefact’ could for example, take the form of a documentation panel (such as those you might already use in your practice), or an artefact in a digital format using photo templates or applications on your mobile phone. Or, you might prefer to select an artefact that meaningfully illustrates ways you negotiate influences on your practice (for example, a photo, drawing or non-confidential document).

We would then organise a time to meet for a one-on-one interview. During the interview, we would explore themes or issues that had come up during the initial focus group, through creating or selecting your visual ‘artefact’, or any subsequent experiences and ideas on the topic stimulated by your artefact. This interview would take about an hour.

With your approval, I would like to copy or collect your artefact, so that I can use it to inform my analyses, and possibly, reproduce it in subsequent publications or conference presentations. I would return any original artefacts to you if you wished. If you were identifiable in the artefact, I would ask for your explicit consent in writing, to reproduce the artefact.

Where possible, I would travel to meet with you in person, otherwise I would conduct the interview over a landline phone or via Skype (using a secure internet connection). I would like to tape-record the interview for accuracy, and return a written copy to you for checking. Any transcripts made of the interview would not identify you by name. I would like to use data from the interviews in a summary to inform the follow-up focus group.

Ideally, I would like to do these interviews during March, and plan for us to meet again as a group in early April.

In any case, I will contact you all again in the next week to check whether you are interested in continuing your participation.
Some ideas

Using photography to evoke your experiences of mixed messages about ‘right’ ways of being, thinking or doing your work in early childhood education. It only needs to be a few images – as long as they convey a meaning that you can talk about.

Think about a time when you recognised and responded to mixed messages about ‘right’ ways of being, thinking or doing your work in early childhood education. This might be a time you identified for the focus group, or another time.

Take or gather some images* that convey how you felt in this experience – for example:

- recognising mixed messages at work
- recognising the sources of mixed messages
- thinking about having to make a choice
- influences on your choices
- weighing up options
- doing something (or nothing) about mixed messages
- consequences, or how you felt about these consequences.

You might like to use the camera in your mobile phone or a digital camera, or you might like to gather existing images from the internet.

If possible, I would like to have a copy of any digital material before our interview, so that I can transfer it to my computer ahead of our meeting. When we meet up for individual interviews, we will then use the images or artefacts as the basis for our conversation.

*If you are taking photos, be sure not to include anyone identifiable.
Appendix 6. Lines of enquiry example

Q: And I think, so xxx have agreed to participate even though they are educators of my son xxx, so we’ve got a direct link. I mean I had someone else from the same centre in my previous group and at the time she wasn’t a direct educator, and I think that made it a little bit easier ethically but I appreciate you raising it and I think it’s really good to have it out on the table and I think that’s a really wise way to have dealt with it.
D: I thought just let me just bring it out and get...
D: Right, I’m xx, I work at xxx which is at the xxx, I run the baby’s room, have lots of fun, lots of cuddles. I’ve got an advanced diploma and I’m hoping to move on to go and get my bachelor. So for me coming here, was just a way of finding out a bigger - because you feel quite isolated at work when you’re in that little notch there. So I just thought this would sort of widen my horizon a bit, yes, I’m really glad to be here today.
Q: I feel very special, thank you.
D: Because we love xxx
(All laughing)
Q: So you came to help xxx really didn’t you?
D: Yep, basically.
Q: So that’s interesting though, I just wanted to say, because there’s a lot of discussion in the past, you know when ABC was huge and I think people equated full profit with this kind of thinking, but we’re talking about a not for profit centre (D: yep, we are not for profit), so this message is coming through even though;
M: It’s contradictory though.
Q: So yeah, is that where you’d identify that sense that I’m the client from-
D: Yeah, yep, yes
Q: It’s not your personal belief?
D: No it’s not my personal belief, no.
Q: What is your personal opinion about it?
D: I am, I feel for xxx that I’m like the great aunt, too young to be the aunt, so I’ll be the great aunt and you’re part of my extended family - you’re not quite young enough to be my daughter, but you know, you’re an extension of my family, so when I think of my own family, I think of the xxx clientele as like being part of my extended family as such. You’re important, like you as a person are important to me. There’s been a time when I’ve come - xxx and xxx have come in and I’ve greeted them good morning, and I always sing “Hello xxx” or whatever I’m doing, and Tamara said “Oh what about me???” (All laughing) I’m part of this too you know.

In positioning yourself, children and parents as ‘family’ does this bring up messages about being in a family that you have to negotiate?
Appendix 7. Discussion prompts to use with ‘Di’

**Being part of the project**

- Would you like to talk any more about the ethics of your involvement in this project?
- You talked about valuing getting a bigger perspective by taking part in this project. I wondered what is it that you feel is ‘out there’ that you don’t access within your setting or team?

**Working with children and families**

- You used the word ‘entrusted’ to describe what parents do when they leave their children with you. Did you want to say anything more about feelings that go with being entrusted?
- In positioning yourself, children and parents as ‘family’, does this bring up messages about being in a family that you have to negotiate?
- What does ‘love’ do, especially in a babies room?
- We talked a bit about the idea of families as ‘clients’. Why does it matter who is paying the bill?

**Cultural difference**

- Can you talk a bit more about being a teacher in South Africa? How were the messages in South Africa about what it means to be a teacher different to here?
- It sounded like you have a lot of sensitivity for cultural ways of being and doing. How do you negotiate the mix and balance?
- You talked about the way that you and L come from ‘different places’ – is that just about coming from elsewhere, or other things too? How have you negotiated differences that you have noticed?

**Expectations and beliefs**

- How do you get messages about expectations – of management, or of parents? How do you work with these, and your own expectations? What does that process ‘do’?
- Did you get to finish the point you were making about being told how to make the room look?
- How do you work with things like ‘being told how the lamp should sit’?
- What does feeling ‘stifled’ do? What does it produce?
- We talked a bit about the requirement for you to include external references in your documentation, and what parents might think about that. Did you want to say anything more about that?

**Working as a team**

- What messages come with hierarchies or top down approaches? What other ways of being in a team together might work?
- You also talked about the role of different expectations between colleagues, and how that might make it hard to ‘bond’, can you say a bit more about this?
- Being the leader of the birth-2s, in what way do you “manage”?
Appendix 8. Documenting moments of affect

J: Like the constricted boxed in, to me is suggesting containment whereas there are some other things, the bending I think is more open, I don't know how others read that.
Q: Yeah I think the reason that I put things like feeling constricted and boxed in in movements is that to feel constricted or boxed in, I think you've got to have a sense that you would like it to be otherwise.
V: Or other things are moving in on you maybe, that's-
Q: Yes I think it's worth exploring, yeah absolutely. Now, and L I think that was your term as I remember it, feeling constricted and boxed in by what choices might be available in a setting. Does anything else come to mind with that?
L: I just, I think that a lot of the movement, it all comes back to being restricted because you may bend but then something will just bring you straight back, so it's a lot of "I'll try this, I'll try this" and then in the end it's like "Why try it because I'm just going to come back to point A".
J: So I'm thinking, what is there that goes in on one's head that makes one feel boxed in, what are the parameters, are there values that you hold yourself?
L: Having limitations put on you.
J: So there's external factors-
L: Yeah and whether they be your values or even something as simple as-
K: Time.
L: Time exactly, there are limitations-
J: Time in relation to efficiency or just no further time to deal with-?
K: I think that, you know this is what I want to do, this is how I want to do it, I'm just not going to have enough time to do that-
L: Have enough time.
K: Puts you in that space of "Okay so do I have a go at this knowing that I'm not going to have the time to do it properly"-
L: Not going to finish it.
F: Or do I just go "Okay this is one of the things I have to slide."
L: Push it to the back.

Has the tone of "okasay, I won't do that..."

Refrains of time through these sentences.

Action of restriction --inelastic "times"
Dear Early Childhood Educator,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project that forms part of my PhD study. I am researching ways that early childhood educators (ECEs) in Australia negotiate influences and messages informing their practice. The main purpose of my study is to contribute new understandings to efforts to improve the sustainability of the early childhood workforce.

I am undertaking my PhD with CSU’s School of Teacher Education (Bathurst) and I am also supported by CSU’s Research in Professional Practice, Learning and Education (RIPPLE) Research Centre. My background is in sociology, and research into early childhood practice. I have also worked in a preschool as an educator, and alongside early childhood early intervention professionals as part of my research work.

I am inviting participants from diverse service types, experience and locations, who are interested in exploring and discussing ways that they negotiate some of the influences and messages informing early childhood practice. It is important to me that your participation is freely given. There is no obligation to: take part in the study; to answer any of the questions that come up during the project; or to take part in the three stages of data collection. Further, participants may withdraw from the project at any time without having to give a reason, and may request that their contributions to arts-informed enquiry and interview stages also be withdrawn. The only exception is that, due to the nature of focus groups, not all information can be removed if participants withdraw after taking part in focus group discussions.

**Stage 1 – initial focus group**
The first stage of the research project is an in-person focus group, where, as a group, we would discuss our understandings of influences and messages that inform early childhood practice, and experiences of negotiating these influences and messages.

Each focus group would include 4-5 participants, and run for around 1 – 2 hours. I would attend and co-facilitate the group discussion along with an experienced focus group moderator, who specialises in early childhood practice. After the group discussion, we would talk through the subsequent stages of the research project for those who indicate they would like to continue their participation.

I would like to audio-tape each focus group meeting for the purposes of analysis (identifying participants only by first name), and after the discussion has been transcribed and names removed, I would email you your own responses to check and correct if you wished to do so. I would then combine all the (de-identified) findings from the focus groups along with material from the next stages of the project, to inform a follow-up focus group meeting.

Focus groups would take place in locations (including regional areas) that are convenient and safe for participants, and could be conducted in the evening or on a weekend day if required. I would meet basic travel expenses for participants to travel to and from focus group meetings (such as train or bus tickets, or parking fees), and would also provide some simple refreshments.
Stage 2 – arts-informed enquiry and interview
The next stage of the project would involve preparing a visual representation (in your own time) that documents ways you negotiate influences and messages that inform your practice. I am aware that you are likely to have multiple demands on your time apart from your work, and expect that participants might spend from ½ and hour to a few hours creating or selecting a visual ‘artefact’. This ‘artefact’ could for example, take the form of a documentation panel (such as those you might already use in your practice), or an artefact in an digital format using photo templates or applications on your mobile phone. Or, you might prefer to select an artefact that meaningfully illustrates ways you negotiate influences on your practice (for example, a photo, drawing or non-confidential document).

We would then organise a time to meet for a one-on-one interview. During the interview, we would explore themes that had come up during the initial focus group, through creating or selecting your visual ‘artefact’, or any subsequent experiences and ideas on the topic stimulated by your artefact. This interview would take about an hour.

With your approval, I would like to copy or collect your artefact, so that I can use it to inform my analyses, and possibly, reproduce it in subsequent publications or conference presentations. I would return any original artefacts to you if you wished. If you were identifiable in the artefact, I would ask for your explicit consent in writing, to reproduce the artefact.

Where possible, I would travel to meet with you in person, otherwise I would conduct the interview over a landline phone or via Skype (using a secure internet connection). I would like to tape-record the interview for accuracy, and return a written copy to you for checking. Any transcripts made of the interview would not identify you by name. I would like to use data from the interviews in a summary to inform the follow-up focus group.

Stage 3 – follow-up focus group
Once all the members of the initial focus group who wish to participate in interviews have done so, and I have completed some analysis of stage 1 and 2 data, we would organise a mutually convenient follow-up focus group meeting. In the follow up focus group, I would use aggregated data from the initial focus group, interviews and arts-informed enquiry to explore issues that were significant to participants or myself, and/or that I could learn more about by seeking discussion with the group. Issues might relate to influences and messages informing practice and ways of negotiating these influences and messages, as well as any changes to practice that participants felt might be related to their participation in the research project.

Some benefits participants might gain from participating include:

- build awareness of the value of critically reflecting on power dynamics that underlie early childhood practice
- build capacity to keep critical reflection going on an ongoing basis
- increase awareness of values and power relations that inform the early childhood field
- enjoy collaborative engagement with other educators, with a range of practice experiences and diverse knowledge sources

It is also possible that participants might find some ideas discussed in the project challenging to their ways of thinking or doing things, but participants would not be expected to share any information that they do not wish to share. Should a participant find any of the discussions distressing, they could withdraw at any time without any repercussions. If needed, free counselling support could be accessed with an organisation such as Lifeline, phone: 13 11 14.

How the data will be used
I will be using the data gained through my research project for my PhD thesis, which involves publishing six or seven articles in Australian and international peer-reviewed journals within the next three years. I may
also use the data in conference presentations in the future. Participant’s names would not be used in any publication or presentation, nor would audio recording of the interviews be made public. As stated above, if participants were identifiable in the ‘artefacts’ they provided, I would seek their consent for reproducing the artefact in a publication or presentation.

**Confidentiality**

As part of participation I will ask that we all respect each other’s confidentiality by not sharing identifiable details outside the group.

In relation to focus groups and interviews, we would select a location where we can speak confidentially (other than your home, workplace or an isolated area). Any recordings made of the interview would not identify you by name.

Finally, please note that as a researcher I am not a mandatory reporter in relation to issues of child protection. However, if a disclosure is made that causes me serious concern for the wellbeing of a child, after consultation with my supervisors, it may be possible that a report be made of suspected neglect/risk of harm according to the procedures of the relevant State or Territory.

If you have any questions regarding my project or would like to clarify any aspect of participation, please contact me via email tcumming@csu.edu.au. If you would like to take part in the study, please contact me by return email, and I will let you know what our next steps will be.

Thank you for your support and assistance with this project,

**Tamara Cumming**

Doctor of Philosophy Candidate
School of Teacher Education
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795
Email: tcumming@csu.edu.au

**Principal supervisor**

Dr Jennifer Sumasion
School of Teacher Education
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795
Email: jsumsion@csu.edu.au

**Co-supervisor**

Dr Sandie Wong
School of Teacher Education
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795
Email: swong@csu.edu.au
Appendix 10. Consent form for participation in interviews and arts-based phases

Negotiating discursive tensions in early childhood practice

Consent Form – Interview and use of artefact/s

Chief Investigator: Tamara Cumming tcumming@csu.edu.au ph: 0438 808 342
Supervisors: Professor Jennifer Sumsion jsumsion@csu.edu.au ph: 02 6338 4423
Dr Sandie Wong swong@csu.edu.au ph: 02 6338 4437

(Please use BLOCK LETTERS)

- have read (or where appropriate have had read to me) and understand the Information for Participants statement and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- agree to participate in the interview stage of the research project. I know that I can withdraw from participation at any time without consequence, and that I am not obliged to participate in further stages of the research project if I do not wish to.
- understand that the interview will be audio-recorded, and that any information or personal details gathered as part of the Project are confidential and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be published without my written permission.
- understand that de-identified data will be used to inform further stages of the research project, unless I withdraw my participation in the project.
- understand that I am free to withdraw my participation in the project and that if I do I will not be subjected to any penalty or discriminatory treatment.
- understand that if I withdraw my participation in the project, I may also request that my contributions of artefacts and/or interview material be withdrawn.
- have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant’s Signature: __________________________________ Date: ____________________

Investigators' Name:_Tamara Cumming________________________________________

Investigator’s Signature:_______________________________ Date:___________________

Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Academic Governance
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795

Tel: (02) 6338 4628 Fax: (02) 6338 4194

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 11. Consent form for participation in initial focus group discussion phase

Negotiating discursive influences in early childhood practice
Consent Form – initial focus group

Chief Investigator: Tamara Cumming tcumming@csu.edu.au ph: 0438 808 342
Supervisors: Professor Jennifer Sumsion jsumsion@csu.edu.au ph: 02 6338 4423
Dr Sandie Wong swong@csu.edu.au ph: 02 6338 4437

I, ________________________________________________________________

(Please use BLOCK LETTERS)

• have read (or where appropriate have had read to me) and understand the Information for Participants statement and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
• agree to participate in an initial focus group stage of the research project. I know that I can withdraw from participation at any time without consequence, and that I am not obliged to participate in further stages of the research project if I do not wish to.
• understand that the interview will be audio-recorded, and that any information or personal details gathered as part of the Project are confidential and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be published without my written permission.
• understand that de-identified data will be used to inform further stages of the research project.
• understand that I am free to withdraw my participation in the project and that if I do I will not be subjected to any penalty or discriminatory treatment.
• understand that if I withdraw my participation in the project, due to the very nature of focus groups, not all information can be removed if I withdraw after taking part in focus group discussions.
• have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant’s Signature:________________________________ Date:___________________

Investigators’ Name:__Tamara Cumming________________________________________

Investigator’s Signature:_______________________________ Date:___________________

Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Academic Governance
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW  2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4628
Fax: (02) 6338 4194

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 12. Consent form for participation in follow-up focus group phase

Negotiating influences on early childhood practice

Consent Form – follow-up focus group

Chief Investigator: Tamara Cumming tcumming@csu.edu.au ph: 0438 808 342

Supervisors: Professor Jennifer Sumsion jsumsion@csu.edu.au ph: 02 6338 4423

Dr Sandie Wong swong@csu.edu.au ph: 02 6338 4437

I, ____________________________

(Please use BLOCK LETTERS)

• have read (or where appropriate have had read to me) and understand the Information for Participants statement and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
• agree to participate in a follow-up focus group. I know that I can withdraw from participation at any time without consequence, and that I am not obliged to participate in further stages of the research project if I do not wish to.
• understand that the interview will be audio-recorded, and that any information or personal details gathered as part of the Project are confidential and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be published without my written permission.
• understand that I am free to withdraw my participation in the project and that if I do I will not be subjected to any penalty or discriminatory treatment.
• understand that if I withdraw my participation in the project, due to the very nature of focus groups, not all information can be removed if I withdraw after taking part in focus group discussions.
• have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant’s Signature: __________________________________________ Date: ____________________

Investigators’ Name: Tamara Cumming ________________________________

Investigator’s Signature: ______________________________________ Date: ____________________

Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Academic Governance
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW  2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4628
Fax: (02) 6338 4194

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 13. Pre-publication version of Table 1.

Studies reviewed for interpretative meta-analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Participant location (as identified by original authors)</th>
<th>Research topic</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Data collection methods</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adair</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Cities</td>
<td>Language use and acquisition</td>
<td>45#</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andersson &amp; Hellberg</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Effects of recognition of prior learning in further education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bown &amp; Sumsion</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Metropolitan Sydney</td>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooker</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Inner city London</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Approx. 32</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownlee &amp; Berthelsen</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Metropolitan city</td>
<td>Epistemological beliefs</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownlee, Berthelsen, Irving, Boulton-Lewis &amp; McCrindle</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Metropolitan city</td>
<td>Epistemological beliefs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colley</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>United City</td>
<td>Learning emotion</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Type of Practice</td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalli</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>255 X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncan</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>South Island</td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>8 X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwards</td>
<td>2005/06</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Theoretical knowledge</td>
<td>14 X X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Einarsdottir</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>20 X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elfer &amp; Dearley</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Experiences of emotion</td>
<td>12 X X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasoli &amp; Ford</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Regional/remote/urban Northern Territory</td>
<td>Culturally contextual practice</td>
<td>2 X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasoli &amp; Moss</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Remote Northern Territory</td>
<td>Culturally contextual practice</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fenech &amp; Sumson</td>
<td>2007a/b</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>212 X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fenech, Sumson &amp; Shepherd</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>5* X X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garavuso</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Influences on practice</td>
<td>3 X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giugni</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Post-structural reflection</td>
<td>35 X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johansson, Sandberg</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Practitioner-oriented research</td>
<td>44 X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- X indicates the presence of a finding.
- Not specified indicates that the information is not available.

196
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Year of Data Collection</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Gender-Sensitive Pedagogies</th>
<th>Pedagogical Beliefs</th>
<th>EC Teacher Identities</th>
<th>Pedagogical Influences on Professional Identity</th>
<th>Professionalism</th>
<th>Pedagogical Influences on Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vuorinen</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Town/city</td>
<td>Fostering gender-sensitive pedagogies</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Seoul</td>
<td>Pedagogical beliefs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langford</td>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>EC teacher identities</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X pre-service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moore &amp; Gilliard</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Rural Montana</td>
<td>EC teacher education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X pre-service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moriarty*</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>UK/Finland</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Professionality</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moles</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Emotion and professionalism</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuttall</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Negotiating professional identity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osgood</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Inner city/suburban/rural</td>
<td>Commercialisation</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osgood</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robson &amp; Fumoto*</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Influences on practice</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sargent*</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Experiences of male ECEs</td>
<td>Approx. 74</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisson</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Rural/suburban</td>
<td>Pedagogical influences on professionalism</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Research Focus</td>
<td>Number of Participants</td>
<td>Other Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skattebol</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Inner city</td>
<td>Identity and social justice</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skattebol</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Professional role</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>X X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumson</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Experiences of male ECE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X X X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumson*</td>
<td>2003a</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Influences on attrition</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumson</td>
<td>2003b</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Influences on educator resilience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumson</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>City/regional</td>
<td>Influences on educator resilience</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surtees</td>
<td>2005/08</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Teacher discourses of sexuality</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL** | | | | | **1208** | | 30 13 5 3 9 15 6 12 1 21 30 |

*Some participants in this study were working in the early years of school.

#Unless otherwise specified in an article, the total number of participants in a study is included here. Where a subset of the total participation was the subject of an article, it is this subset that is used as the “number of participants in the study”. These articles are indicated with a #.