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 paper 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 professional 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.

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Reading between the lines: An interpretative meta-analysis of ways early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing practice.

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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 paper 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 professional 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 Co-Operation 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 (ECEs)[1] (UNICEF, 2008; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2012), as well as debate regarding the role of ECEs’ qualification levels in exacerbating or ameliorating problems of workforce retention (see for example, Mead & Carey, 2011; Whitebook, Austin, Ryan, Kipnis, Almaraz,
& Sakai, 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 ECEs 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 (Sumson, 2005; Osgood, 2006; Karila, 2008; Kuisma & Sandberg, 2008; Urban, 2008; Woodrow, 2008; Osgood, 2009; Duhn, 2010) and quality (Oberhuemer, 2004; Tobin, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Ishimine, Tayler, & Thorpe, 2009; Moss, 2010) – might impact on ECEs’ 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 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 professional practice. However, as Nuttall, Murray, Seddon and Mitchell (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 paper is to report on an interpretative meta-analysis of qualitative studies concerned with some of the ways early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing early childhood practice. The paper 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 Gannon (2006) follows. The paper 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 upon 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,
Moss & Pence, 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 paper 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, n.p.). We have drawn on some features of meta-interpretative 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 (Weed, 2005). 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, Lynham, & Guba, 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 re-analysing 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 (eg Osgood, 2012) and book chapters (eg Grieshaber, 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 numbers 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; and
- Primarily conducted in prior-to-school early childhood contexts [5]; and
- Involving ECEs with, and those without, formal qualifications in early childhood education, and those ‘pre-service’ and working in the field.

For an overview of the studies selected for inclusion in the interpretative meta-analysis, see Table I.

Please insert Table I about here

*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 paper).

**Phase 1: Descriptive overview of the selected studies**

As outlined in Table I, the 38 studies analysed [6] were undertaken in Australia (15), United Kingdom (8), United States (5), New Zealand (4), Sweden (2), Canada (1), Finland (1), Iceland (1) and South Korea (1). The majority of studies (25/38) were conducted with degree-qualified (or equivalent) participants working in prior-to-school settings, with between 1-40 years of experience. Only five of the 38 studies were conducted with ‘pre-service’ ECEs, three involving participants in degree programs, and two in non-degree programs. 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 (7/38) including participants in ‘regional’, ‘rural’ and/or ‘remote’ areas. Nine of the 38 studies 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 Sumsion (2007a, b), Surtees (2008) and Giugni (2011); socio-cultural 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 (30/38), followed by observation (15/38), reflective statements (12/38) and group-based discussions (13/38), 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 United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the United States, there were distinctive patterns of locally relevant concerns. For example, studies conducted in the UK by Brooker (2010), Colley (2006), Elfer and Dearnley (2007), Moyles (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 (Moyles, 2001) and class identification (Colley, 2006; Brooker, 2010; Osgood, 2004, 2010). These concerns seemed often to coincide with, or respond to, the introduction in 2007 in the UK 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 Moyles, 2001 and 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 & Sumsion, 2007b; Fenech, Sumsion, & Shepherd, 2010; Giugni, 2011). By contrast, studies conducted in the United States 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 EC services and neo-liberal policy agendas for example, were discussed in relation to the United States (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.

Please insert Figure 1. about here.

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, Gannon, Laws, & Watson, 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 “determinational” or “destratify” (1987, p. 3), we see strategies such as ‘conformity’, ‘compromise’ and ‘resistance’ constituting ‘lines of force’ that form and re-form ‘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, Gannon, Laws, Lenz Taguchi, McCann, & Rocco, 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 (Osgood, 2010; Elfer & Dearnley, 2007), 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 & Sumsion, 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 (Osgood, 2010, 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” (2011, 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 & Sumsion, 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” (Elfer & Dearnley, 2007, 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 Sumsion’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”. 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 (2007) 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” (Elfer & Dearnley, 2007, p. 277). Regulatory discourses claim to promote discourses of ‘quality’ and ‘safety’ (Fenech, Sumsion, & Goodfellow, 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 & Sumsion, 2007). 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 early childhood educators 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 2-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 (2010) study reported that they “struggle[d]” (p. 125) and “wrestle[d]” (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 (2010, 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’ (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 (Bown & Sumson, 2007, p. 39). This dynamic is echoed in Dalli (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’ (Sumson, 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 (ie 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 & Sumson, 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 (Bown and Sumson, 2007, p. 44).

**Strategic resistance**

As the instances of strategic compliance above remind us, power relations are mutually constituting, have the potential to be both repressive and productive, and, that “those who, recogniz[e] 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 United States 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 United States 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 “…apprais[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, considering how ECEs’ personal experiences, beliefs, stereotypes and perspectives might inform their practice (Edwards, 2006; Elfer & Dearnley, 2007).

*Theoretical perspectives and critical reflection as resources*

In Fenech and Sumsion’s study (2007b, p. 119) ECEs 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 ECEs to imagine ‘other possibilities’ for themselves – in their ‘professional’ roles (Fenech & Sumsion, 2007b; Langford, 2008; Andersson & Hellberg, 2009; Giugni, 2011) in relation to policy (Osgood, 2010); to make links with their ‘intuitive’ understandings (Moyles, 2001; Johansson, Sandberg, & Vuorinen, 2007) and as the basis for advocating and justifying their practice choices. (Moyles, 2001; Edwards, 2005, 2006; Fenech & Sumsion, 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 & Sumsion, 2007b), professional learning (Moyles, 2001; Edwards, 2005, 2006; Fenech, Sumsion & Shepherd, 2010; Osgood, 2010), and/or by taking part in research projects that involved their engagement with critically reflective practices (Moyles, 2001; Edwards, 2005, 2006; Bown & Sumsion, 2007; Fenech & Sumsion, 2007b; Fenech et al., 2010).

Having theoretical resources and critically reflective practices to draw upon, seemed to enhance ECEs’ construction of their practice as “intellectual” work (Sumsion, 2004, p. 288), rather than being limited to powerful discourses of emotionality and/or maternalism as
definitive characteristics of early childhood practice (Sumion, 1999; Moyles, 2001; Sumion, 2003a; Dalli, 2008). Researchers also reported that ECEs 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 (Moyles, 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 ECEs as ‘empowering’. One ECE in Fenech, Sumion and Shepherd’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 ECEs 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 ECEs gained experience and expertise in utilising theoretical resources, they had the confidence to question dominant discourses (Moyles, 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 ECEs are subjected, or create themselves as subjects, could depend in part on what theory of the ‘self’ they hold, and what relationship ECEs 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 Sumion (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 Sumion’s earlier (1999) study of a male ECE, whose attempts to challenge stereotypes of men working in childcare ultimately failed. In this case, the male ECE’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]” (Moyles, 2001, 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 clos[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 Sumsion (2003a) indicates however, reflection without criticality increases its potential to be deployed as a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988, 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, Gannon, Honan, Laws, Muller-Rockstroh, & Bendix Petersen, 2006, p. 103), as 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 n.p.). However, although our purpose in this paper 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 paper, 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 paper are isolated and small-scale, others report on studies that are: multi-national (Moriarty, 2000; Adair, 2011); multi-stage (Brownlee, Berthelsen, Irving, Boulton-Lewis, & McCrindle, 2000; Edwards, 2005; Colley, 2006; Edwards, 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; Surtees, 2005; Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006; Colley, 2006; Edwards, 2006; Fenech & Sumson, 2007b; Giugni, 2011), and through their use of multiple methods of data collection to investigate research topics (Colley, 2006; Elfer & Dearnley, 2007; Fasoli & Moss, 2007; Fenech & Sumson, 2007b; Osgood, 2004, 2010; Skattebol, 2010).

**Implications for further enquiry**

The focus of this paper 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 (Sumson, 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 & Sumson, 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 paper 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 re-formed 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 (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). 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.

Endnotes

[1] The term ‘early childhood educators’ is used in this paper to refer to 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, 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 socio-cultural theorists among early childhood scholars from around that time (Fleer, 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; Surtees, 2005, 2008; Fenech & Sumson, 2007a, b; and, Langford, 2007, 2008), hence, we refer to a total of 38 studies.

[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 #.

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