

**EXPLORING ASPECTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER AND
LEADERSHIP IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION: TOWARDS AN
ENGAGED FEMINIST PEDAGOGY OF ADULT EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores aspects of the relationship between gender and leadership in Early Childhood Care and Education within an Irish context. Early childhood Care and Education includes day care facilities and services for children aged 3 months to 12 years. Services offer care, education and socialisation opportunities for children. This thesis examines the historical, political and social, context in which Early Childhood Care and Education is set. The conceptual framework for this thesis explores the theories of Foucault, Gramsci, Giroux, Bourdieu, Marx, Freire, hooks and key feminist poststructural theorists. This thesis is set within a feminist paradigm with the aim of giving a voice to the women and children within the field of Early Childhood Care and Education. The Early Childhood Care and Education workforce is dominated by females, which presents a phenomenon not found in other areas of education. The analysis uses discourse analysis and rhizoanalysis, to unearth the impact of a feminised workforce. It reveals counter-hegemonic discourses such as nurturing capital and collaborative leadership styles within the ECCE service. Implications and recommendations for adult educators and early childhood studies are drawn from the data gathered and theories explored. This thesis demonstrates a working example of leadership in action. It offers a road map for the further development of Early Childhood Care and Education services, ascertaining the need to broaden the conditions of meaning making for the workforce. Within an engaged feminist pedagogy this thesis identifies strategies to support leaders to emerge at grass roots' level. Finally, this thesis attempts to illuminate the potential of Early Childhood Care and Education as a model for a more caring and socially just society.

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ACRONYMS

ADM	Area Development Management
AONTAS	The Irish National Adult Learning Organisation
CE	Community Employment
DES	Department of Education and Science
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EOCP	Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institution
EU	European Union
EYE	Early Years' Educator
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
NCIP	National Childcare Investment Programme
NDP/CSF	National Development Plan/ Community Support Framework
NVCC	National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative
OEDC	Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation
VEC	Vocational Educational Committee

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Aistear is the national curriculum framework for child from birth to 6 years. The curriculum is not fixed or formal and is based on themes of young children's learning and development.

Community childcare services – crèches, full day care settings, these terms are often used synonymously and there is no difference between them. These services offer full time care for children from about 12 weeks old up to 12 years old. They are usually open for 8 hours per day. The words setting and service are used interchangeably within this research.

Curriculum addresses the totality of the child's learning and development. It encompasses all the skills, values and knowledge, both intentional and unintentional that children are meant to learn in educational settings.

Developmental psychology is an educational practice that embraces children's developmental stages.

Early childhood care and education includes day care facilities and services for children aged 3 months to 12 years. Services offer care, education and socialisation opportunities for children.

Early childhood is defined as the period before compulsory schooling, in Ireland from birth to six years.

Early childhood setting refers to any early childhood service. The words setting and service are used interchangeably within this research.

Early childhood studies/programmes provides professional training and education for students to become early years' educators.

Early years' educator (EYE), titles for the adult working in Early Childhood Care and Education service vary, for example childcare worker, practitioner. The term Early Years' Educator is deliberately used within this thesis to reflect the educational aspect of the role. EYE and staff are used interchangeably.

Equal opportunities childcare programme (EOCP) 2000-2006 provided capital and staffing grants. The European Employment Guidelines and Structural Fund, 'contributed 73 per cent towards the EOCP programme while 27 per cent was funded by the Irish exchequer' (OECD, 2006, p.355). The main objective of the EOCP was to enable parents to avail of training, education and employment through the provision of quality childcare supports.

FETAC stands for the Further Education and Training Awards Council and is the national awarding body for all further education in Ireland.

Free Pre-school Year is a scheme intended to provide children aged between 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months in September of the relevant year with a free pre-school place.

National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) 2006-2010 is a five year investment programme that succeeded the EOCP. The NCIP has an allocation of €575 million, including €358 million for capital investment (OMCYA). The NCIP seeks to provide education measures for children and adults in areas of social and economic disadvantage.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was established to advise the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post primary schools.

Siolta is the national quality framework for the early childhood sector. It establishes the quality standards to which all services should aspire. It is designed to support practitioners in the development and delivery of high-quality care and education services for children aged from birth to 6 years.

The National Childcare Strategy was published in 1999 and made recommendations in relation to the development of Early Child Care and Education. The strategy was implemented through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) from 2000 to 2006. The National Childcare Strategy aims to further develop childcare infrastructure through the National Investment Childcare (NCIP).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Exploring aspects of the relationship between gender and leadership in early childhood care and education: Towards an engaged feminist pedagogy of adult education.

Introduction to the thesis and its structure

This thesis was developed as part of the requirement for a MEd in Adult and Community Education. As the researcher, this thesis was heavily influenced by my own personal and professional experience of working in early childhood care and education, as well as my current position as an adult educator of accredited childcare courses. This section presents an overview of the topic to be studied, the research objectives and the structures of the chapters. It frames my picture of the world and outlines my personal journey in creating this research.

Initially this thesis sets out the historical, political and social context that is applicable to the development of ECCE. In Ireland, the evolution of ECCE has been largely driven by the forces of the labour markets, while the current political priority given to these services emphasises a solution to many social and economic problems.

The conceptual framework utilised for this exploration is that of dominant discourses and counter-hegemonic discourses. This thesis challenges dominant discourses such as psychology and economics within ECCE and the knowledge that they produce. Within this thesis the socially marginalised position of women working in ECCE is examined. Furthermore, this thesis explores the ideology of women within a care giving paradigm which has contributed to a distorted perception that only women have the capacity to nurture young children in early education. In ECCE where women dominate the field little research has been undertaken. An objective of this research is to give women working within ECCE, the opportunity to represent their perspectives of leadership.

This thesis argues that if early years' educators (EYEs) are to achieve professional status equivalent to that of similar or related occupations, it is necessary to nurture individuals who will emerge as leaders at a grass roots' level. This thesis assumes that education has a role to play and presents an argument for an engaged feminist pedagogy within early childhood studies.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this research to address all of the issues that may be impacting on women working in ECCE (for example class division). This research attempts to explore the issue of gender through the lived experiences of the women and children in the ECCE sector.

A single case study is used to investigate the research question. This research is set within a feminist paradigm; the qualitative methods of inquiry include in-depth interviews with leaders of an ECCE setting as well as a consultation process with a group of preschool children attending the setting. Discourse analysis and rhizanalysis is employed to analysis the data gathered. Filtering the experiences of women leading the service and the children involved in the research and my own experience, as the researcher, I examine the implications for a feminist pedagogy of adult education within early childhood studies that strives to bring about social justice, equality and a more caring society.

This research is presented in six chapters. The chapters are structured as outlined below:

Outline of chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter one presents an overview of the topic to be studied and the research objectives. It frames my picture of the world and outlines my personal journey in creating this research.

Chapter 2: Historical, political and social context

Chapter two charts the evolvement of ECCE in Ireland. This chapter examines the historical, political and the social context of ECCE. In addition, issues concerning care, quality and education are explored through the writings of Hayes, Dalberg, Moss and Mac Naughton. Perceptions and issues relating to leadership in ECCE are explored through the writings of Rodd, Whalley and Siraj-Blathford.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter provides a conceptual framework for the research including theorists Foucault, Gramsci, and Bourdieu. It positions the topic within feminist poststructuralism drawing heavily on Ryan, Connell, Lynch and hooks. It explores Giroux's work in relation to the conceptualisation of childhood. It examines theories of experiential learning as well as critical theories of education as presented by Freire and hooks. It emphasises the practice of consciousness-raising/praxis within an engaged feminist pedagogy.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter provides insights into the epistemological stance of the research. It outlines the feminist paradigm and the relevance of this approach to the research. It presents the qualitative methods to be used. It provides the methods and rationale for using poststructural frameworks in the analysis of data gathered. Finally, this chapter gives an account of ethical consideration and the limitations of the research.

Chapter 5: Findings and analysis

This section presents the data as it was uncovered during the research. It introduces the findings by identifying the discourses influencing the participants' accounts. The dominant discourses are presented in a poststrutural framework of Connell's taxonomy of gender relations. The counter-hegemonic discourses

are presented within a framework of Lynch's concentric circles of care relations. A process of rhizoanalysis is applied to the data gathered from the children which is linking to popular culture, the animation *Peppa Pig* and feminist theory.

Chapter 6: Implications, recommendations and conclusions

This chapter of the thesis explores the implications and recommendations raised by the research. It identifies further areas for research and draws a conclusion to the thesis.

A personal perspective: framing my picture

From a personal perspective I started my career in ECCE, unqualified. As I engaged in educational opportunities I found myself more often thrust into leadership roles. The role and responsibilities of leading a team towards the provision of a high quality service comes with notable challenges, such as poor working conditions, lack of social policy and funding programmes which demand quantity not quality. I have held numerous roles in the ECCE field, including EYE, and co-ordinator of a community full day care service. I presently work as an adult educator of accredited childcare courses. Based on my experience and curiosity the research question has emerged.

On becoming a feminist

I originate from a rural working class background and although I did not fail at secondary level education, I was never reaffirmed or inspired by education. I realise now that this was more to do with my lack of cultural capital as opposed to my abilities. I would have related accessing education later in life more with overcoming a class divide rather than my gender being an issue. I have often jokingly said, "*What has feminism done for me? Except now I have to work harder (children, household duties, full time job and education)*". However, on accessing feminist material such as hooks, and Ryan coupled with critical theories such as Friere, Foucault and Gramsci I have begun to understand the interlocking systems of gender, class and race. The process of carrying out this

thesis has given me the opportunity to read my world from a more political perspective. Now I can begin to disentangle the webs of dominant discourses and hegemony within a capitalist patriarchal system.

Trusting the process

I recall during class for this MEd one tutor stating, 'the thesis will begin to write itself'. My own interpretation of this statement aligns with trusting the process involved in the development of the thesis. The key was surrendering the control, opting to feel secure in the not knowing. The constant flux between the data emerging and theory as well as been guided by the principles of a feminist paradigm allowed me to engage in a creative process. During the process of creating this thesis I have accumulated different lens, which have enabled me to make the familiar strange and continue my personal and professional development. Previously as an adult learner, previously I have been excited when introduced to new concepts and theories. However, my personal experience during the process of developing this thesis has been much more profound. I have at different points been overwhelmed with joy, soul filled moments, as new realisations unfolded and I became the creator of new personal meaning. I have during the process of this work reconnected with a part of me that truly finds joy in learning. Perhaps this reconciliation is with an earlier part of me that was lost within the walls of a forceful banking system of education.

A reflective practitioner

This research has given me the opportunity to go beyond the dominant discourses that shroud ECCE within an Irish context. Throughout the research I have felt privileged to be in a position to illuminate the quieter discourses such as nurturing capital and collaborative leadership styles. ECCE in Ireland is surrounded by a discourse of deficiency which includes policy and investment. A huge weight, reflected in policies such as *the workforce development plan*, has been placed on staff within ECCE to raise quality and improve services.

However, investment by the state has not been forthcoming or the demand from society for progressive services for our youngest citizens.

I now realise that my practice, as a leader of services and adult educator, emulated this discourse of deficiency within ECCE. Carrying out this research has been a catalyst in shifting my personal position from one of deficiency to one of hope. Additionally this research has given me the opportunity to use different tools other than developmental psychology. Using tools such as rhizoanalysis and discourse analysis has created space for different narratives for the staff and children participating within the research. Finally, I reflect on the concept of education, as put forward by West, as a transitional space through which I have reinvented myself.

Educational situations can become transitional space where identities may be negotiated and risks taken in relation to potentially new identities.

(West, 2006, p.42)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented an overview of the topic, the research objectives and structure of the thesis. It also attempted to capture my own personal journey while creating the thesis. The next chapter will describe the ECCE service that participated in the research. The historical political and social, context in which this ECCE service has emerged will also be explored.

CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Introduction

This section of the thesis describes the ECCE service that took part in the research; *Exploring aspects of the relationship between gender and leadership in Early childhood care and education: Towards an engaged feminist pedagogy of adult education*. Additionally, the evolvement of ECCE within a historical, political, and social context will be outlined. Furthermore, the impact of government initiatives relating to ECCE will be critically evaluated. A discussion on quality care and education within ECCE will follow. An in-depth discussion relating to the ECCE workforce and policy development will be presented. Additionally, theories of leadership in the context of ECCE will be outlined. Finally, I will summarise and draw out the implications for the thesis.

The case study

The service that participated in this research is a community childcare setting offering full day care to children aged 3 months to 12 years old. It is managed by a voluntary committee consisting of parents and local people within the community. The service employs 14 full time staff, 4 community employment participants and students carrying out work experience during the academic year. The pedagogical practice is based on developmental psychological. Staff in the setting hold FETAC childcare qualifications placed at level 5 and 6 within the National Framework of Qualifications. There are 69 children in total attending the service. The leader of each room and the Co-ordinator of the service took part in this research. The service is divided into different rooms according to children's age. The Baby Room accommodates children from 3 to 18 months, the Toddler Room accommodates children from 18 months to 3 years, the Preschool Room accommodates children from 3 to 4 years and the Afterschool Room accommodates children from 4 to 12 years. Children attending the preschool service took part in this research. The ECCE setting

that participated within this research has evolved within the historical, political and social structures as follows in the next section.

Evolvement of early childhood care and education

Since the 1980s, women's community education groups continually identified lack of childcare facilities as barriers for women accessing education. AONTAS (2004) identified 'a key feature of local based adult education groups was the provision of childcare to learners, many operated on a "no crèche, no classes" policy (p.4). The 2000 *White paper: Learning for Life*, the key policy document for the development of adult education services in Ireland identified 'numerous submissions stressed the issue of inadequate childcare as the major barrier to adult learning opportunities, particularly for women' (DES, p.42). Unfortunately the statutory sector at this time was slow to respond to the voluntary and community sector's ambition to broaden the focus of childcare. The OECD (2006) thematic review highlighted, 'in Ireland up until the 1990s, public recognition and the government's views on support for childcare related to children at risk and in need of protection. A national agreement, *Partnership 2000*, involving government, trade unions, employers and community organisations generated a broader focus of childcare' (p.352). Lack of coordination due to the auspices of children being under several different departments was identified by the Forum Report, 'as a significant issue which inhibited the progression of early childhood care and education in Ireland' (DES, 1998, p.27). The *Ready to Learn: White Paper on Early Education* (1999) recommended a more coherent approach to the delivery of ECCE services 'an overarching policy framework which aimed to build on existing provisions and improve the extent and quality of services provided' (DES, p.7). In 2005 the effort to co-ordinate early childhood policy was reflected in the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. In recent times Ireland has taken unprecedented steps towards the creation of a dynamic vision for ECCE. This included the allocation of a universal funded free preschool year, the development of Siolta, the national quality standards for the early childhood sector (CECDE, 2006) and Aistear, the curriculum framework for children aged birth to 6 years (NCCA, 2010).

Direct relationship between ECCE and the economy

Within the Irish context ECCE was brought to the fore by the needs of employers, which stimulated an increased demand for childcare places. A major obstacle identified for women participating in the workforce was accessible, affordable childcare.

The provision of childcare facilities is seen as playing a role in mobilising untapped or under-utilised labour resources (particular female labour supply), thereby increasing employment rates.

(NDP/CSF, 2003, p.25)

Additionally, Ryan (2001), voiced concerns that 'despite the growth of the "Celtic Tiger" economy in the late 1990s, low-paid, part-time and temporary jobs and lack of childcare facilities act as a barriers to the economic equality of women' (p.12).

In 1996, the European Commission Network on Childcare recommended that public expenditure on services for young children under the age of 5 should not be less than 1% of GDP. Conversely, instead of heavy public investment in ECCE,

Ireland in general has relied on the markets to provide childcare with public investment less than 0.5% of GDP.

(NESF, 2006, p.18)

Under the framework of the National Childcare Strategy, public investment programmes for ECCE included the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, (EOCP, 2000-2006) and the current programme the National Childcare Investment Programme, (NCIP, 2006-2010). The EOCP and the NCIP are heavily funded by the European Employment Guidelines and Structural Fund. Therefore, both programmes are linked to EU employment policy rather than a commitment from the Irish state to provide quality provisions of ECCE. As confirmed by the OECD thematic review (2006), 'the labour market participant of parents has been the driving force for establishing grant-aided provision in the sector' (p.20). Yet, Donohoe and Gaynor (2011) point out that the EOCP has 'delivered an estimated 37,000 new childcare places, but not necessarily for the most disadvantaged children' (p.10). The criteria for the EOCP and NCIP funding programmes varied, for example the NCIP targeted disadvantaged

children in a more structured way. However, both programmes emphasis on the creation of childcare places is summed up by Hayes (2008), 'over time it may well be the case that the construction sector, rather than children, families or the early childhood care and education sector, will be seen as the real beneficiaries' (p.18).

The next section will examine the quality and care debate that surrounds ECCE.

Care, education and quality

The distinction between care and education is an ongoing debate within ECCE. Hayes (2007) calls for further debate on how best to consider the interconnected elements of early educational processes and practices, highlighting the need to reconceptualise 'care' so that it has equal standing with education. One of the main obstacles to this debate,

... is the strong association between the concept of care and that of mothering as opposed to the notion that care is educational.

(Hayes, 2007, p.6)

A report from a UK government agency identified seven factors indicative of good quality provision,

... adult-child interactions that is responsive, affectionate and readily available; well trained staff who are committed to their work with children; facilities that are safe and sanitary and accessible to parents; ratios and group sizes that allow staff to interact appropriately with children; supervision that maintains consistency; staff development that ensures continuity, stability and the improvement of quality; and a developmentally appropriate curriculum with educational content.

(National Audit Office, 2004, p.39)

Meanwhile Dahlberg and Moss (2008), address the problem with quality as a constructed concept located in a neo liberalism narrative of how social and economic problems can be eliminated by early childhood services.

Apart from stimulating women's employment by providing childcare these outcomes are mainly concerned with future development, educational attainment and employability of the child, in a context of increasing competition and change, as well as with the prevention or amelioration of

a range of social ills among children, families and community.

(Dahlberg *et al*, 2008, p.4)

Consequently, ECCE is dominated by certain disciplinary perspectives and the knowledge that it produces, in particular psychology and economics. These disciplines exercising social regulation and economic success in which

...the young child is constructed as a redemptive agent who can be programmed to become the future solution to our current problems.

(Dahlberg *et al*, 2007, p.22)

In spite of the dominant discourses Dahlberg *et al* put forward the notion that ECCE services have 'the potential to be sites of critical thinking, deconstructing and reconstructing discourses' (p.34). Within an Irish context, a welcome development is Aistear, the recently launched early childhood curriculum framework. Aistear uses themes to present children's early learning and development. This approach indicates a move away from thinking about children's learning and development in discrete developmental domains as applied by psychology.

Furthermore, Mac Naughton (2005) explores alternative disciplines in addition to developmental psychology which could be used in ECCE settings, such as rhizonanalysis. According to Mac Naughton rhizonanalysis offers an alternative narrative of the child

Rhizonanalysis shows how to weave an alternative 'readings' into the everyday work of observing, documenting and analysing children, their learning and their relations.

(Mac Naughton, 2005, p.120)

Rhizonanalysis derives from the philosophical and cultural theories of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). They describe a common metaphor for analysis is that of a tree, by tracing branches or digging to the root the analyst gets to the heart of the matter. On the other hand, Rhizome is a poststructural metaphor that includes complex collections of stems. The tree's linear structure from the roots through to the trunk represents a fixed logic contrasting the rhizome's 'lateral' structure, which is a collection of mutually dependent 'roots' and 'shoots', a metaphor that represents a flexible and 'lateral' logic that encompasses complexity.

... rhizome is a map and not a tracing ... the map is open and connectable in all its dimensions it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted, to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.12).

The next section will explore the challenges that face the workforce in the ECCE sector.

The pink ghetto

The NVCC (2006) describes the ECCE workforce as a 'male/female ratio of no more than 1:99, being comprised of a mix of graduate workers, experienced workers with no training, experienced workers with certified training and community employment schemes, all working in a system that currently has no formal requirement for qualifications' (p.4). Traditionally jobs within the ECCE sector are considered of low status and low pay. For instance according to the INTO salary scale the unqualified hourly rate (including 22% holiday pay) for a substitute primary school teacher is €40.85 (INTO). Staff working in ECCE would earn proportionately less than this. The average rate of pay for a leadership role as indicated by the staff taking part in this research is €12 per hour, even if the employee holds a primary degree. A census of childcare provision stated that

... the average salaries for both full and part-time staff were poor ... one quarter of all facilities relied on volunteers and community employment schemes ...

(ADM, 1999, p.61-70)

Further studies found that many personnel working in ECCE, in particular community services may have left school early, many without qualifications and in some cases having had a negative school experience (OMNA, 2000). A major mechanism for ongoing professional development for EYEs has been provided within the framework of Further Education (FE) through the awarding body FETAC. In 2009, a background discussion paper, *Developing the*

Workforce in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector, was published. Although the report indicated a high level of up-skilling since 1999, a sizable number of the current ECCE workforce are still in a similar situation as found by the OMNA study in 2000. Furthermore, the report identified a number of current challenges for staff working in ECCE assessing and participating in education,

... as a low wage employment sector the participation on unsubsidised education and training programmes may be beyond the reach of the workforce ... grant aid is also tied into full time courses which mitigate against participation in part-time courses.

(DES, 2009, p.36)

Other challenges include been released from work, the issue of finding substitute cover for staff participating on courses was identified as difficult for services. The final section of this chapter will examine the role of leadership in ECCE.

Leadership in early childhood care and education

In ECCE where women dominate the field, little research has been undertaken. The writings and research of Rodd, Siraj-Blathford and Whalley, which is drawn on international insights, will contribute to the examination of leadership in ECCE. Leadership in ECCE is seen as a key element to ensuring the success of the Early Years' service for young children and parents. The role of the EYE as outlined by Rodd (2006), 'is becoming increasingly complex as they continually need to be responsive to changes in national policy, unemployment, family structures, ensure inclusion of all children and families from different cultural backgrounds, be responsive to children living in poverty and advocate for children's rights' (p.3). Furthermore, Whalley advocates the role of EYE as an 'aspirational' one,

... the early years' professional seeks to demonstrate and model the highest possible commitment to quality early years practice and to lead and improve the practice of others in the field.

(Whalley, 2009, p.9)

Additionally, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) in the ELEY study identified 'a clear correlation between strong leadership and children's progress' (p.1).

Furthermore, the ELEY study offered a broad understanding of leadership, illuminating the notion of a 'learning community and team culture' (p. 21). The concept of a learning community involved the continuous engagement of staff in professional practice. However, Rodd (2006) highlights that numerous studies indicate that, 'members of the profession have yet to identify and agree on what capacities, abilities, competencies and strategies are related to leadership in early childhood education' (p.14). Additional international studies indicate that EYEs holds a narrow conceptualisation of their role, one where the focus is direct care and interaction with children and are not yet comfortable with the demands of a leadership role.

... many still report that they are not comfortable with activities ... such as managing programmes, marketing, lobbying, making speeches, fundraising and research.

(Rodd, 2006, p.6)

Rodd believes that empowerment of the Early Years' field has to begin with people who feel comfortable in and choose the leadership role at program level, and who will progress to leadership at government and policy level. The basis of such empowerment lies according to Rodd (2006), 'in the reconceptualisation of the role from the 'grass roots' up' (p.7).

Additionally, Rodd's review of leadership in ECCE identifies a unique style of leadership that is highly influenced by women's preferences for intimacy, flexibility, collaboration and collective success, an ethos of which is reflected in their leadership styles, traits and behaviours, some studies report,

... that women take and are developing a specific leadership repertoire, and some find no gender differences in leadership; however numerous studies report woman engage in repertoires different to men. For leaders in early education the majority who are women, leadership is exercised in a climate of reciprocal relationships where the leader seeks to act with others rather than assert power over others. Effective leaders in early years are interested in empowering restructuring teaching, acting as role models, encouraging openness and stimulating questioning.

(Rodd, 2006, p.33)

Although Whalley (2009) points out that 'a gender critique of leadership may be at risk of oversimplifying the issues. Contrasts between men and women's leadership style may be influenced as much by the situation and culture rather than essential differences between men and women' (p.63). For instance,

Chakraborty (2003) study gives examples of leadership in the East which is dominantly feminine – intuitive, whereas examples from the West are dominantly masculine – rationale (p.33). In spite of women in early years developing an unique style of leadership Rodd questions

... the continuous focus on nurturing, unselfishness and improving the quality of children's environments has been given undue prominence and used to absolve practitioners from their responsibility for meeting their own needs for economic and political improvement.

(Rodd, 2006, p. 80)

Yet, Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) suggest that 'women's ability to speak about leadership styles is hampered by prevailing notions of leadership and management that emerge from traditionally organised settings' (p.25).

This final section draws out the implications and conclusion for this research.

Implications and conclusions

This section outlined the historical, political and social context in which ECCE has evolved. Within the Irish context the development of ECCE has been largely driven by the forces of the labour markets as opposed to the desire to create a more equitable society for children and families. Although there has been substantial capital investment through programmes such as EOCP the inadequacies highlighted in this research demonstrate the consequences of prioritising quantity in the initial planning of services. While policies and investments such as the free school places are contributing to the further development of ECCE, it is clear that the programmes need to have the best interest of the child and families at the heart of policy rather than economic imperatives. The care, quality and education debate is reflected in data gathered during this research. The data confirms that the narrow perception of care shadows the complex role and challenges of working with children in early childhood. This research seizes the opportunity to divert from dominate disciplinary perspectives such as developmental psychology. Rhizoanalysis is used as a tool to analysis the data gathered from the children who took part in the research. The analysis presents a different narrative of the children while simultaneously demonstrating the benefits for EYEs. Participants within the

research confirm their commitment to ongoing professional development however they also identify many obstacles such as the challenges outlined above in accessing education. Within the research, data gathered indicates leadership styles leaders exercised in a climate of reciprocal relationships where the leader seeks to act with others rather than assert power over others. Nurturing and a caring identity also feature strongly in the research. From the data and conceptual framework within this research I have formed an opinion, that Rodd's positioning of women working in ECCE as focusing on nurturing and therefore not meeting their own needs appears to overlook the patriarchal structural systems that negate against women working in the field. This thesis illuminates the essential human quality of nurturing as a highly developed skill within the ECCE workforce. This research will argue that for professionals working in the sector to become empowered and reconceptualise their role from grass roots' level they need conceptual tools to critically think about the power of the systems in which they are deployed.

Conclusion

In conclusion by outlining the historical, political and social context in which ECCE has evolved this section attempts to place the research in the appropriate literature. With the aim of appreciating the complexity of ECCE within its embedded context, I have attempted to draw out the implications for the thesis. The next chapter will present the conceptual framework for the research.

Chapter 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This section sets out the theoretical framework for the research question; *Exploring aspects of the relationship between gender and leadership in early childhood education and care: Towards an engaged feminist pedagogy of adult education*. This chapter, through the writings of Foucault, will explore the relationship between power, knowledge and truth. In order to examine the discursive climate, which positions women as the main carers in society, the work of feminist writers Ryan and hooks will be heavily relied on. The historical, political and social construction of childhood is discussed through the work of Giroux. Bourdieu's taxonomy of capital and recent research carried out by Lynch provides the theoretical framework to analyse the counter-hegemonic discourses, which emerged during the research. In determining the role of education in nurturing leaders within ECCE to emerge at grass roots' level feminist critical theory is examined through the works of Freire, Marx, Ryan and hooks.

Power/Knowledge: discursive climates and implications

Power as described by Foucault (1980) as 'neither a given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action' (p. 89).

Therefore, power within Foucault's terms is not static or top down but flowing all around us. Knowledge as described by Foucault does not exist in opposition of society and state but in a mixed pot, in the form of power/knowledge.

Knowledge or what is defined as legitimate knowledge and truth is a product of the power relations that form the dominate discourse.

No knowledge is formed without a system of communication, registration, accumulation, and displacement that is in itself a form of power, linked in its existence and its functions to other forms of power.

(Foucault, 1994, p. 17)

Discourse theory as developed by Foucault support the analysis of systems including thoughts, ideas and images that weave our cultural perceptions. In Foucault's analysis power cannot exist without a discourse;

Relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourse.

(Foucault, 1980, p.83)

Ryan (2001), suggests that 'Foucault's focus on the political production of the truth which is beyond our immediate control situates meaning in a Power/Knowledge nexus which cannot be separated from time, place, culture and history, politics and society' (p.33). By using discourse as a tool for analysing the power relations that are oppressive we are able to unmask power or what appears to be natural and normal. For example, a dominant discourse surrounding the role of women in Irish society can be unmasked by analysing the Irish Constitution for example,

Section 2 of article 41 explicitly promises:

1. In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

The dominate discourse within the Irish Constitution

... portrays a narrow role for women, equating them with motherhood and work in the home, perpetuating beliefs that women should be the main carers in society. Recent childcare debates have been constrained by the assumption that women are the only sex properly suited to childcare, and by the silence of most men on the issue.

(Ryan, 2001, p.12)

Furthermore Ryan (2010) highlights the importance of recognising the discursive climates which nurtures certain discourses more than others. For instance the 'discursive climate of prioritising economic growth has made it more likely that when people think of equality, this work-oriented discourse of "women being like men" would come to dominate. Thereby muting other discourses of equality, which promote the idea that men should spend less time in paid work, and participate more in unpaid and often economically invisible care work' (class notes). Likewise, the dominant discourses that ensure women are positioned as the main carers in society are nurtured by the discourse that men are not capable of being the main carers in society.

Gender can be reinforced according to Ryan (2001) by essentialism assumptions; she suggests drawing on Connell's taxonomy of gender relations to provide a structural analysis within feminist poststructural research. Firstly a structure of a gendered division of labour based on the principle of separation, secondly a structure of power, based on the principle of unequal integration and thirdly a structure of cathexis (Connell, 1987:96-7; 1990:523-6, 1995:74-5). Although Connell did not suggest a principle for a structure of cathexis, Hollway (1994) suggests the principle of emotional investment in gendered subjectivity which reproduces gendered power relations.

Similarly other feminist writers such as hooks (2002) argue that, 'no one believes that males are inherently capable of nurturing, but that this sexist stereotype continues to shape cultural perceptions about female identity' (p.79). The insistence that there is a naturally biologically based world of sex differences is at the heart of patriarchal thinking.

Anti patriarchal thinking acknowledges the reality of biological differences between genders but recognises that cultural conditioning has shown itself to be stronger than anatomy – and that anatomy is not destiny.

(hooks, 2000, p.83)

hooks (2002) questions the assumption that women are less violent than men and more care giving, by calling attention to adult female child abuse. She uses the example that 'mothers can assume both the role of caregiver and abuser which can lead to the minimisation of their abusive behaviour. On the other hand fathers who are abusive rarely give sustained care and therefore are rarely idealised' (p.83). The ideology portraying a universal truth that women can only be the main care givers in society is based on a system of beliefs, values and practices that reflects existing social structures, systems and relations. Significantly hooks (2002) emphasises 'that our powerful cultural idealisation of women as caregivers is really one of the few positive traits assigned women by patriarchy' (p.84).

Furthermore, hooks presents a view of feminism in a holistic manner that does signify a fight against men to gain equality but a fight against dominate ideologies that are represented in systems of domination.

The interlocking systems of gender repression, racism and classism all impact on the social construction of women's identity.

(hooks, 1989, p.31)

The previous section explored Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge which manifest through discourses. This research relies heavily on Ryan's example of using discourse analysis as a tool to unmask the power which constructs a feminised workforce with ECCE. The analysis of the data collected from participants within the research is loosely set in Connell's taxonomy of gendered relations. The following section presents Gramsci's contributions to the concept of hegemony, which widens our understanding of how repressive powers of dominant discourses lulls people into submission.

Hegemony/Counter-hegemony and implications

Gramsci (1971) identified two domains of control and power which preside over people. On a political level the state exercises control and power through 'the apparatus of state coercive power which legally enforces discipline on those groups who do not consent either actively or passively' (p.12). Secondly in civil society where the 'spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general directions imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental groups' (p.12). However, the non static nature of hegemony allows for negotiation and renegotiation as emphasised by Williams (1977), 'it is never either total or exclusive. At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in society,' (p.113). Hegemony, according to Williams is in a constant state of renewal and modification, simultaneously 'it is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressure not all its own', (p.112). The non-static nature of hegemony gives space for counter-hegemony moments, which could lead to the renegotiation of dominant hegemonic discourses. For Gramsci (1995) the institutions that play an important part in exercising an educational, hegemonic relationship are

those that constitute 'civil society'. Gramsci (1995) argues that it is necessary to 'engage 'in a 'war of positions', an ideological war waged in and across the entire complex of civil society' (p.350).

Ideology becomes hegemony, according to Brookfield (2005) 'when the dominant ideas are learned and lived in everyday decisions and judgements and when these ideas, reinforced by mass media images and messages, pervade the whole of existence' (p.95). Lemish has been teaching critical analysis skills in media production with the aim of raising consciousness of gender stereotyping in media texts. For Lemish

Dominant media messages continue to promote restrictive ideologies of femininity

(Lemish, 2008, p.58)

Throughout this research hegemony is reflected in the legitimate knowledge that women are natural care givers. Rhizoanalysis demonstrates how this defined legitimate knowledge is reinforced by dominant media messages of femininity that children are receiving. The held perceptions regarding men and women working in ECCE reflects our servitude to hegemonic discourses within a patriarchal system which is hurting women, men and children. Gramsci's ideas that informed the concept of hegemony provided a theoretical framework for this research to identify the counter-hegemonic discourses. In order to analyse the counter-hegemonic discourses that appear to be occurring within the ECCE setting, I was led to review Bourdieu's taxonomy of capital alongside Lynch's recent research that identifies nurturing as a form of capital.

Forms of capital and implications

Bourdieu's writing has given considerable attention to the possession of economic, cultural and social capitals in overcoming educational disadvantages. He introduces the idea that capital is not just an economic form but has different forms such as cultural and social. Bourdieu describes capital as the

... accumulated labour (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive,

basis by groups or agent, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of living labour.

(Bourdieu, 1986, p.46)

Bourdieu proposes that capital reproduces and expands in identical forms, therefore those in society with capital in the first place can continue to expand and reproduce thereby continuing the cycle of inequality. Recent research by Lynch, Baker and Lyons (2009) builds on Bourdieu's taxonomy of capital highlighting nurturing and emotional capital. The research carried out by Lynch *et al* demonstrated the importance of intimate care and nurturing for personal identities. Drawing on the experiences from a diverse set of carers and care recipients the research provides insights into understanding the complexity of care, as well as the existing inequalities regarding gender and class. Lynch *et al* calls for social policy to recognise the interdependent relationship between the public and private sphere.

Love, care and solidarity labours produce outcomes and forms of nurturing capital available to us personally, socially and politically. The amount of nurturing capital available impacts on people's ability not only to relate others at an intimate level, but also to flourish and contribute in other spheres of life.

(Lynch *et al*, 2009, p.50)

Issues to do with love, care or solidarity were mainly ignored until the 1980s and 1990s when feminist scholars highlighted the role of emotional and care work within employment and the home. Lynch *et al* surmise that 'the reluctance to name care as work arises from the public's allegiance to the traditional feminine activity of care which is viewed as a personal and private matter' (p.36). Yet care is work because it requires competence, skills and learning to do it well.

Love labour is affectively- driven and involves at different times and to different degrees, emotional work, mental work, cognitive skills and physical work.

(Lynch *et al*, 2009, p.36)

Lynch *et al* (2007) identifies Concentric Circles of Care Relations; primary care relations, secondary care relations and tertiary care relations. The research by Lynch *et al* draws a distinction between primary and secondary love labours. However the distinction made is along a continuum rather than a sharp division. The distinction between primary and secondary care is characterised by a long

term commitment by the primary carer in an ongoing relationship to nurture another. This long term commitment is different to a secondary care commitment that is provided within a contractual agreement. However, secondary care within ECCE can span over a substantial length of time, for example, the child may access the service at 3 months and move through the different rooms within the service until they have reached 12 years old. Additionally, Lynch *et al* (2009) point out, 'that the difference between secondary care labouring, which can be commodified, and love labouring, which cannot, are only minimally understood' (p.55). This research is not suggesting that secondary care relations can replace the nurturing capital of a primary care relationship. Moreover, this research reflects Lynch *et al*'s (2009) view 'if the person received much care in life, be it at a personal, community or state level then they are 'care-rich' (p.50). Furthermore, Lynch (2007) identified tertiary care relations: solidary work which is more collective in form and can be expressed as voluntary or community work although it can operate outside a face to face relationship.

Within the research I am identifying nurturing capital within the framework of Concentric Circles of Care Relations as counter-hegemonic discourses. The nurturing capital evident within the research has the potential to overcome the characteristic of a capitalist neo-liberal agenda such as competitiveness and individualism. The next section will present Giroux's writing which focuses on the social, historical and political construction of childhood.

Construction of childhood and implications

Giroux (2000) in his writings '*Stealing Innocence: Corporate Cultures War on Children*', uncovers how childhood is socially, politically and historically constructed. In unearthing the construction of childhood he uses a framework of three myths, the 'end of history, childhood innocence and disinterested scholarship'.

The first myth the 'end of history', explores the ideologies of liberal democracy and market moralities. Giroux asserts that the tension, which would be expected between market moralities and values of a civil society such as justice and

rights for children, is eroded due to the mesmerising effects of consumerism and corporate culture.

Little public recognition is given to the limits that democracies must place on market power or how corporate culture and its narrow definition of freedom as a private good actually may threaten the well-being of children and democracy itself.

(Giroux, 2000, p. 2)

The second myth, Giroux (2000) unravels the notion of childhood innocence, where children are seen as 'innately pure and passive, children are ascribed protection but at the same time, denied a sense of autonomy' (p. 4). In unravelling this shroud of innocence Giroux implicates the adults' unwillingness to recognise childhood construction as forgoing their responsibility, to understand or challenge the power relations that forge child's experiences.

When adults cling to the idea that a thriving free market economy, with its insidious consumer based appropriation of freedom of choice, provides the greatest good for the great number, they diminish the role of political life in favour of an exclusive focus on individual experiences – on a personal responsibility and self interested rather than one of the collective good.

(Giroux, 2000, p. 6)

In the third myth 'disinterested scholarship', Giroux (2000) identifies commercial interests and the modern obsessions of careerism and specialisation as the direct cause of the erosion of teaching and learning as a platform for social justice. Stemming from 'the isolation of educators from politics and the pressing demands of civic life' (p.3), Giroux argues that attempts to turn learning environments into places where citizens learn to critically engage and reflect on the power structures that are impacting on their lives are dismissed as unprofessional.

The relevance of Giroux's myths to the development of ECCE services in Ireland as outlined in chapter 2 is clear. In Ireland the reliance on a mixed market model to early childhood services has led to the early education and care of young children being treated as a commodity, reduced to a product to assist parents to rejoin the labour force. Additionally, the feminisation of the ECCE workforce could be viewed as the commodification of women's labour. The second myth presented may explain the avoidance of responsibility both by

the state and society to decide what type of early educational experiences would be most beneficial for our young children. The third myth could be applied to educational spaces associated with ECCE, as this research indicates where there is little reflection on the power structures that are impacting on the sector. This thesis assumes that adult education has a role to play in supporting the development of ECCE, in particular developing the capacity to critically think about the power structures that are impacting on the sector. The next section will explore the meaning of experiential learning that emerged during the research in contrast to critical theories for adult learning.

Adult education: dominant discourses and implications

The true meaning of adult education is reduced by neo liberal ideology which similarly underpins economic development and public policy.

Lifelong learning is a discourse mobilised within increasing risky and unprotected work conditions that require women to work and train harder and longer while still undertaking full time home duties and self funding training.

(Blakemore, 2007, p.9)

There is a high expectation on women working in ECCE to continually train and self fund training which is reflected in the workforce development plan as outlined in Chapter 2 and the data gathered.

Experiential Learning and implications

Participants within the research describe experiential learning and their processes of critical reflection. As outlined by Fenwick (2003) much adult learning is commonly understood to be located in everyday experiences that occur within everyday workplace tasks and interaction, homes and family activity, community involvement, and other important sites of non formal and sometimes unacknowledged education (p.1). The importance of reflection in experiential learning has been developed by Kolb (1984), whose model suggests how reflection and action are related in experiential learning. Furthermore Schon, (1983) drew attention to what he coined as reflection in

action which acknowledged the important learning that unfolds through problem solving out of everyday experiences where outcomes are uncertain and situational dimensions are constantly shifting. The most prevalent understanding of experiential learning is based on personal reflection of the experiences. On the other hand critical theory centres power as the core issue in experiences.

Towards an engaged feminist pedagogy and implications

Freire developed a critical theory of education as a site for the transformation of society. His radical politicised views of education included approaches of raising consciousness and that education was a force that could promote social justice.

In Ireland during the 1980s community education emerged as a force that could promote social justice in response to the oppression women were experiencing.

Women's groups have, according to Ryan and Connelly (2000), mostly have taken the form of personal development courses. Personal development groups were criticised by Mulvey's (1995) report as diverting women from engaging in structural change. However, as highlighted by Ryan (2001), the issue of politicised personal development education was raised in research by Clancy (1995). Clancy's research, according to Ryan (2001) 'identified that the majority of personal development courses in Ireland are facilitated by religious personnel or by people with a primary interest in counselling or psychology' (p.13).

Furthermore, Ryan points out that 'psychological and religious approaches to women's personal development and education share a view of "women" that does nothing to challenge existing power arrangements' (p.14). Within the research this approach may be reflected in one participant's experience of a personal development course. Moreover, the epistemological stance of facilitators delivering personal development courses is crucial to the success of such courses in empowering women.

We need feminist/politicised facilitators who are able to incorporate social analysis, radical politics and feminism into course content which is also capable of meeting the felt and expressed needs of many women for a focus on their personal lives.

(Ryan, 2001, p.15)

Politicised education begins with consciousness-raising which leads to the development of critical thinking. Freire's fundamental belief is embedded in the concept of *conscientizacao*-consciousness-raising, which he viewed as an instrument for changing our internal world. Through the process of consciousness-raising we are able to critique the webs of interlocking systems of oppression embedded in society and how we internally elude to these oppressions.

... the basic importance of education as an act of cognition not only of the content but of the "why" of economic, social, political, ideological and historical facts, which explain the greater or lesser degree of "interdict of the body", our conscious body, under which we find ourselves placed.

(Freire, 2009, p.87)

Furthermore, Marx argues that the alienated state of man is through historical materialism, emphasising that one must understand his real, social and material conditions.

It is not the consciousness of men that determine their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness.

(Marx, 1978, p.4)

The phrase 'interdict of the body' used by Freire refers to the absence of self from privileged spaces. Within this research it could be argued, as outlined in Chapter 2, that numerous women working in ECCE have been alienated from the privileged space of education. Additionally, alienation can also take the form of academic writing that is not accessible to everyone. hooks describes education as a practice of freedom which embodies a way of teaching that is accessible for anyone to learn

Feminist theory should necessarily be directed to the masses of women and men in our society, educating us collectively for critical consciousness so that we can explore and understand better the workings of sexism and sexist oppression the political basis of feminism critique and to be better able to work out strategies for resistance.

(hooks, 1989, p.35)

Consciousness-raising within a feminist context, according to hooks (2000), needs to 'emphasise the importance of learning about patriarchy as a system of domination, how it becomes institutionalised and how it is perpetuated and

maintained' (p.7). Although the revealing of realities through consciousness-raising, does not ultimately mean that reality will be changed. Freire further describes the dynamic relationship between consciousness-raising and the practice of transformative practice. Freire coined this unity between consciousness-raising and action as praxis.

Consciousness-raising, authenticity is at hand when the practice of the revelation of reality constitutes a dynamic and dialectical unity with the practice of transformation of reality.

(Freire, 1972, p.88)

While hooks (1994) describes Freire's work as 'a phallogocentric paradigm of liberation' (p.49), she recognises that at the core of his work is education as a practice of freedom. Progressive education, hooks coins as an 'engaged pedagogy' enables the student to transgress boundaries of race, class and gender. To achieve an engaged pedagogy hooks articulates a holistic nature of education which invokes teachers to recognise the unique individual within students

... to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students which is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.

(hooks,1994, p. 13)

Within holistic education, as hooks (1994) suggests the teachers must be 'actively committed to a process of self actualisation that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students' (p.15). As democratic educators, hooks (2003) implores educators to 'incorporate teaching practices that honour diversity, resisting the conventional tendency to reinforce existing structures of domination such as those of race, gender, class and religious hierarchies' (p.45).

Feminist critical theory is relevant to this research as it gives a framework for politicising adult education for early childhood studies in a holistic manner. Feminist consciousness nurtures adults to recognise that they are themselves agents of power possessing the capacity to subvert dominant power relations within a patriarchal system. With resistance to dominant ideologies the learner can become more open to unexpected possibilities for work, life and development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature referred to the contributions of key social, political and educational theorists. The literature review has provided a conceptual framework for the research question; *Exploring aspects of the relationship between gender and leadership in early childhood education and care: Towards an engaged feminist pedagogy of adult education*. Including a framework for discourse analysis loosely based on Connell's taxonomy of gender and the possibility for counter-hegemony discourse such as nurturing capital. Throughout this section the implications for this research are drawn out, in particular feminist consciousness. The next section outlines the methodology.

CHAPTER 4: THE METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodology adopted for this thesis and the choices made in the research design. The research question and design are heavily influenced by the researcher's professional and personal experiences as outlined in Chapter 1. The research topic, *Exploring aspects of the relationship between gender and leadership in Early Childhood Care and Education: Towards an engaged feminist pedagogy of adult education*, endeavours to understand the lived experience of the leaders and children within an ECCE settings. The research is set within a feminist paradigm. This chapter outlines the epistemological stance within a feminism paradigm and the rationale for choosing a qualitative method of data collection. Included in this chapter is the framework was used for analysing the data, the ethical issues and limitations considered.

Critical theory within a feminist paradigm: an epistemological stance

Critical theory as described by Brookfield (2005) is 'centrally concerned with releasing people from falsely created needs and helping them make their own choices regarding how they wish to think and live' (p. 367). Conversely, concepts and ideas developed by critical theorists such as Freire's Gamski's and Foucault are criticised for their lack of analysis of patriarchal systems and the way in which it alienates women.

Feminist theory attempts to address the absence of analysis of patriarchal systems in different ways. For example Perry's (1970) study of developmental theory in which he formulated five stages of cognition formed from his analysis of male students. In response to Perry's analysis, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's research reformulated five stages in which women construct knowledge. Belenky *et als* (1986) criticised Perry analysis and argued that 'women's ways of thinking do not fit so neatly into his categories' (p.14). By putting forward an argument for the recognition of gender-based modes of cognition Belenky *et al* are criticised for dangerously promoting an essentialism position that further reinforces clear opposition of men and women. In response

to Belenky *et al*'s research, poststructural feminists such as Ryan (2001) highlighted that 'they do not address women's knowledge as socially and politically organised, but as something intrinsic to women' (p.71). Poststructural feminism views the division between men and a woman as socially constructed and rejects the notion that human beings have essential gendered natures. In addition hooks argues that

Feminist thoughts must continually emphasize the importance of sex, race, and class as factors which *together* determine the social construction of femaleness.

(hooks, 1989, p.23)

Moreover, hooks calls for the feminist theory to include men and women in a collective consciousness raising effort to ensure equality within our society. Men as described by hooks (1984) are also 'bounded by patriarchal systems of domination and have a fundamental role in the progression of the feminist movement' (p.7). Furthermore, hooks (1984) states that 'men have a tremendous contribution to make to the feminist struggle in areas of exposing, confronting, opposing, and transforming the sexism of their male peers' (p. 81). In order to form a resistance to oppressive sexism, hooks emphasises that feminist theory should be accessible to everyone and not reside only among academics.

The conceptualisation of childhood within the feminist paradigm

Although children and childhood has begun to feature as a subject for feminist analysis, notably in the past there has been an absence of discussions relating to how the child and childhood should be understood within feminist theory and politics. Possible reasons for the absence of childhood conceptualisation within feminist analysis are highlighted by Burman and Stacey (2010), such as the infantilisation of women and the conforming of women to maternal positions within an oppressive patriarchal system of domination.

The absence of explicitly feminist attention to childhood was understandable given the need to challenge and transcend the male stream theory and practice which equate women's interests with those of children.

(Burman *et al*, 2010, p.228)

Burman *et al*/ identified that 'feminists have resisted the positioning of women as the main carers in society through the exposure of discursive climate of biological and cultural perceptions' (p.229). Recently, Claudia Castaneda (2002) has brought the debate of conceptualisation of childhood to the fore within feminist theory. She questions how the child functions as a sign, a metaphor and a figuration within society. For Castaneda, the figure of the child is characterized by its transformational potential which can be influenced by competing adult desires and projections.

The child is not only in the making, but also malleable ... and so can be made.

(Castaneda, 2002, p.2)

Burman and Castaneda argue that the potential attribute of the child to transform is exploited by the convergence of developmental discourses such as scientific psychological and economic. Both writers argue for the imperative need to locate the child within the discursive climate in which he/she is deployed.

Rationale for choosing a feminist paradigm

Feminist research places gender, as argued by Harvey (1990) 'at the centre of social inquiry making women visible and representing women's perspectives' (p.154). Within the feminist paradigm the researcher must recognise the power dynamics which construct the social position occupied by women. For instance, the ECCE workforce is dominated by females, which presents a phenomena not found in other areas of education. Harvey (1990) also notes that 'beyond the emancipator endeavours, the feminist research approach is guided by sound methodologies that produce valuable and high quality research findings and use both qualitative and quantitative approaches to achieve the objectives of the research' (p.54). However, the distinction between qualitative and quantitative is highlighted by Oakley (2000) 'the qualitative is the soft, the unreliable, the feminine the private – the world of "subjective" experience. The quantitative and the experimental are hard, reliable, masculine, and public: they are about objectivity' (p.42). In this instance Oakley uses the feminine and masculine not only to refer to men and women as social groups but as a general metaphor for

the powerful and powerless. Therefore qualitative methods are advocated for research with less powerful groups such as women and children.

Rational for selecting a single case study

The most appropriate method to investigate the research question is a single case study, which focused on a single case only. According to Yin (1989) 'the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real life events' (p.14). The issues relating to leadership within ECCE are complex and intricately linked to social policy, economic forces and society's' perceptions. This research sought, as described by Stake (1995), 'greater understanding of the case, we want to appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of its embeddedness within its contexts' (p.16). Therefore, a descriptive case-study in this instance aimed to present a complete description of the phenomenon of a particular early years setting within its historical, political, social and economic contexts.

Case studies have been criticised by some as lacking scientific rigour and reliability as they do not address the issue of generalisation. However, Merriam (1988) articulated that the strength of a case study is that it enables the researcher to gain a holistic view of a certain phenomenon or series of events. Although the case study is the main method, within it different sub-methods are used. Data accumulated by different methods but bearing on the same issue are part of what is called a multi-method approach. This approach from different methodological standpoints is described by Creswell (2003) as triangulation. I have used in-depth interviews with the staff members and a consultation process with the children.

In-depth interviews

I carried out in-depth interviews with five staff members, all of whom hold leadership roles within the setting. The rationale of holding in-depth interviews was to ascertain the staff members' perspectives on building the capacity of leadership within ECCE, their views on gender within ECCE and the role of adult education. Harvey (1990) notes that within a feminist paradigm, 'in-depth interviews encourage subjectivity and intensive dialogue' (p.64).

Group interview - consultation with the children

To ensure that the voice of the child is heard within this research a consultation process was carried out. The rationale for the involvement of the children within this process is to give their perspectives within the research. For instance, what is the impact of a feminised workforce on the children's view of the world? In order to hear the voice of the child the method known as the *mosaic approach* as developed by Clarke and Moss (2001) was employed. Within the mosaic approach, one method of gaining information is not heavily relied on but many, in this case a combination of puppets and art was utilised.

Methods and rationale of analysis

Within the feminist paradigm, I have used the tool of discourse analysis relying heavily on the work of Ryan, and Connell's taxonomy of gender relations. After transcribing all the data I used a colour coding system to identify different themes that emerged. I analysed the participants accounts gathered from the in-depth interviews for evidence of different discourses. Four main themes emerged from the participants' data which reflected a pattern of discourses based on Connell's taxonomy of gender relations as outlined in Chapter 3. The four main themes that emerged were poor working conditions; a gendered division of labour, the language of carers; a structure of power, a caring identity; a structure of cathexis, men are definitely not care-givers; a structure of power/cathexis.

I examined participants' accounts for evidence of counter-hegemonic discourses. The data gathered revealed different forms of nurturing capital, in order to analysis this data I have used Lynch's concentric circle of care relations as previously discussed in Chapter 3. The themes that emerged are nurturing rationalities versus economic rationalities, nurturing capital; love labour, solidarity in relationships and solidarity within the community. Gleaned from the research further evidence of counter-hegemonic discourses are themes of leadership styles, lifelong learning, experiential learning versus critical thinking and personal development. Barriers to accessing education and investment are two further themes that emerged during the research.

I analysed the data from the consultation process with the children using the method rhizoanalysis as derived from the philosophical and cultural theories of Deleuze and Guattar as previously discussed in Chapter 2 The data gathered from the children is linked to popular culture, the animation Peppa Pig and feminist theory.

Two main themes emerged from the consultation process with the children. Long lashes; gendered characteristic, girls can, boys can't; a gendered division of labour. The theme girls can, boys can't, reflected the first structure of Connell's taxonomy of gender relations; a gendered division of labour.

Ethical considerations

Within the feminist paradigm, Harding challenges the notion that the identity of the researcher has no effects on the quality of the findings.

... the class, race, culture and gender assumptions, belief and behaviours of the research must be placed within the frame of the picture he/she is attempting to paint.

(Harding, 1987, p.9)

As a researcher, I am aware that my own experience and perspective, as outlined in Chapter 1, has influenced the research question and shaped the meaning I give to the analysis. Therefore, an ethical consideration lies in the recognition of the interwoven relations between myself and my role as researcher. The challenge for me as the researcher was to construct a

framework to analyse the emerging themes in a way that did not reinforce gender status quo. Throughout the research I have been introspective and tried to acknowledge any personal bias in order to avoid creating an essential view of leadership in ECCE. I was aware of my responsibility towards individuals in upholding their rights. Before conducting research I informed all participants of their rights in the research process as included in appendix .

Limitations of the study

Due to the time limitation of this study I did not consult with other staff, parents, the management committee or other agencies such as the childcare committee involved in ECCE services. Additionally, staff hold certain affiliation to each other and the service, which may have influenced their responses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this section represented an outline of the feminist paradigm and the qualitative methods to be used in this research topic. It outlined the methods of discovery, including the case study of the ECCE setting, the in-depth interviews and the consultation methods with the children. It declared the rationale for choosing the methods such as the case study, discourse analysis and rhizoanalysis. It outlined the methods of analysis. Finally, this section describes the ethical issues considered and the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This section presents the data as it was uncovered during the research. The dominant discourses are identified alongside the quieter counter-hegemonic discourses. It applies the methods and rationale of analysis as outlined in Chapter 4. It seeks to explain how the findings concur or departs with the theorists and writers in the field as previously discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

Findings and analysis

Discourse 1: poor working conditions

A gender division of labour as outlined by Connell's is based on the principle of separation in labour markets of women's and men's jobs. As postulated by Lynch *et al* (2009), 'the low status and wages of full-time carers reflect the deep disrespect there is for caring in society' (p.36).

We don't get sick pay I am in a private pension scheme. The government should be doing more and it shouldn't come out of the budget for the service. I wouldn't expect that. It's not going to happen, this government might do something. There is a few local TDs here I wouldn't mind lobbying them.

(Interview Participant 2)

In a recession you are happy with what you get but I think it could be better paid. I know it could change. It hasn't changed much since I got my level 6 last year.

(Interview Participant 4)

The pay does not reflect the amount of responsibility you have; it is all down to you. There is no maternity pay from here. There should be especially saying as it is a childcare place. There should be sick pay as well, especially when you have children of your own, the children might be sick.

(Interview Participant 5)

As presented in Chapter 2, the above statements, from staff confirms low salaries and poor working condition in ECCE. Participants 2 and 3 put forward the view that ECCE salaries should be funded by the state. Additionally Participant 2 identified the need to lobby government. Participant 3 links low wages to wider society's perception of ECCE. Participant 5 highlighted the contradictory nature of only receiving state benefits for maternity leave while working in childcare setting. Poor working conditions are also reflected in no sick pay entitlements or pension contributions from the service.

Discourse 2: the language of carers

Foucault (1984) identified language as a symbolic representation of dominant discourses. Within Irish society care is often seen as the primary function of ECCE as opposed to the intrinsic link between care and education as presented in chapter 2. Additionally, 'community and industry's stereotyped perception about jobs dominated by females also contribute to the de-valuing of ECCE as a legitimate profession' (Rodd, 2006, p.18). The usage of the word care may reflect the dominant discourse of gendered work associated with women and care.

People think that is a babysitting service. Some think that we are only here to mind children, they don't see behind the scenes. Maybe if the word education was added, they do learn so much here.

(Interview Participant 1)

A lot of people would think that it is just childminding, especially the older people, not just older people but even young mothers.

(Interview Participant 2)

Outside our work they might think it is only a childminding service, overall they think that we only sit here and look after the children they can't see what is put in.

(Interview Participant 3)

All of the participants highlighted the lack of understanding within wider society regarding the role of ECCE. Participants identified wider society's perception of ECCE as a childminding or a babysitting service. This perception of ECCE does not acknowledge the educational aspect or indeed the professional nature of

their work. Participant 1 recognised the limitation of the word 'care' and suggested adding the word 'education'.

Discourse 3: a caring identity

Connell's taxonomy of gendered relations identifies a structure of cathexis which is based on the construction of emotionally charged relationships. As described in Chapter 3, Hollway (1994) suggests that there is an emotional investment in gender relations. Additionally Ryan (2001) points out that, 'all women are positioned in discourses of femininity which read women as powerful mothers and care givers (even if this power is repressed)' (p.111).

Well I always wanted to work with children, I am the oldest in my family, there is ten years difference between me and my younger brother. I was always looking after him. So from very young I have always known that I wanted to work with children.

(Interview Participant 1)

As a teenager, my cousins were home from England, the children were 2 and 4 years old. The children seem to come to me a lot. I felt that they were taking to me from that time on I did babysitting, the children enjoy me, loved me. I have always loved children and children seem to love me and enjoyed coming to play with me.

(Interview Participant 3)

The two participants identified at an early age their strength as powerful care givers. Participant 1 reflects aspects of hooks (2002) argument that 'girls are consistently taught how to nurture where boys are not taught with the same consistency' (p. 84). The data indicated participant's identity investment in the discourse of caregivers which may concur with Ryan (2001), 'this recursive positioning in any discourse through which a woman can be read as powerful will produce an identity investment' (p.109).

Discourse 4: men are definitely not care givers

The discourse men are definitely not care givers falls into all of Connell's structures of gender relations. Firstly, in the division of labour based on the principle of separation, childcare is seen as a women's job not a man's job. A

structure of power based on the principle of unequal integration applies as men and women are regulated by dominant discourses in society by which tasks/jobs they can perform. Finally, a structure of cathexis based on the principle of emotional investment. The cathexis of the discourse men are definitely not care givers may stem from women's identity investment in the discourse of caregivers. As previously discussed, in Chapter 3, hooks and Ryan articulate that the perception men are not natural caregivers, and reinforces the dominant discourse that women born are with nurturing instincts.

If men want to come in and work with children, I'll not say no. I don't know how parents would take it. I know that there are mothers and fathers looking after their children but they are used to having women here [referring to the setting]. A lot of people think that only women can look after children, that's what the majority of the world think.

(Interview Participant 1)

It's hard for men, someone might say he's gay, which is not a nice thing to say, he is not a man if he works with children and women. That's not my opinion my best friend is gay.

(Interview Participant 2)

I can't see why men couldn't, it might be difficult on both sides, you might think should I ask him to change a nappy or take that child to the toilet should there be a male and a female going with that child.

(Interview Participant 3)

From the data gathered participants indicated that men working in childcare would be viewed as suspicious. This discourse of suspicion would question a males masculinity and more dangerously would question his motivates such as access to children in order to abuse them. The fact that women are as capable of inflicting child abuse as men is a contradiction to the dominant discourse that women are natural care givers.

Counter-hegemonic discourses

Nurturing rationalities versus economic rationalities

Nurturing rationalities are different to, and often trump economic rationalities. Lynch *et al*'s (2009) research found that primary carers 'often make economic and personal sacrifices in order to prioritise the care of those they love; they can and do place love labouring over both career gains and financial gains' (p.76).

I'm hoping to do my level 6. But I don't feel comfortable leaving the room for 2 days to take part in the training. A lot of parents know me, so it is hard to take a day off. When you come back they will say things like the wee ones really missed you. It is very hard because they notice that you are not there. I know that I'm not thinking of myself but I have to think of here as well. It is important for me to go on and do the level 6.

(Interview Participant 1)

I would take a pay cut if the service needed it. It is a good service and people need it.

(Interview Participant 2)

Although the research carried out by Lynch *et al* (2009) referred to primary carers the narratives presented by staff in this research indicates that the children and indeed the welfare of the service is prioritised before their own needs. Participant 1 prioritised the children and parents' need for consistency over her own training needs which may lead to career advancements. Participant 2 would take a pay cut with the view of ensuring the continuation of the service.

Nurturing capital: love labour

Love labour as defined by Lynch *et al* (2009) included 'at a mental level, holding the person and their interests in mind, keeping them "present" in mental planning, and anticipating their needs and interests' (p.45). Furthermore, Lynch *et al* found 'narratives with respect to caring for children were focused on their happiness in the present and their security in the future' (p.5). Additionally Lynch *et al*'s research indicated that children exercised a certain amount of power and control over their own caring, often drawing on cultural narratives to assert their care need.

Preschool is my area, preschool is the age group that I just love. They come with so many stories; they think that they know all about the world. When they come in September 'til they leave us in June, they can't even put on their coat or sit at table, eat snack, even by now February/March the differences in them, they have got so independent. Parents come in and tell you, he never used to eat fruit now he eats fruit. It is just so rewarding, they're so excited coming to tell you their stories, it mightn't mean much to some people but to the people that work in preschool it means a lot.

(Interview Participant 1)

The children love to paint, so I would do a lot of painting with them. People think that it is a lot of work but they children need it. The children should come first, as long as they are happy and safe. I know a lot of parents wouldn't be doing painting at home; they wouldn't have the time we need to give them all of that.

(Interview Participant 2)

If we have a plan, we sit down with the children, they might say we are not doing that, then we change the plan. I don't like to restrict them, it's not structured, it has to be flexible. I don't like to see them sitting at table, they have been sitting all day at school. I don't stick to the plan; it depends on what the children want. They have a big impact on the room.

(Interview Participant 4)

From participants' accounts above it could be asserted that the practice of nurturing by the staff allows the children certain autonomy within the daily programmes. Participant 1 articulated how children within the service are supported in life skills as well as a high value placed on children's interpretation of the world. Participant 2 indicated the importance of the children's happiness by providing a range of learning experiences such as painting. Participant 4 demonstrated meeting the children's need by including their opinion, which is reflected in the flexibility of programmes and activities. Participants 2 and 4 demonstrated elements of love labour as defined by Lynch *et al* at a mental level, which they hold the children's needs and interests in mind.

Nurturing capital: solidarity in relationships

As identified by Lynch *et al* in chapter 3, love, care and solidarity labours produce outcomes and forms of nurturing capital available to us personally, socially and politically. A major characteristic of a learning community as previously discussed in chapter 2, is the strength of relationships and the congeniality that arises from a felt interdependency with others.

Mary and I trained together, I know how Mary works and she knows how I work.

(Interview participant 1)

If staff have a problem or are not happy they can come to me. I have a good working relationship with them. They can come and say I don't like this or I have any another idea, they give me a lot of ideas and I love that.

(Interview participant 2)

If you have a member of staff working with you and you know that there is something, you can feel it in the room. I would approach calmly and ask if there is anything wrong. They would normally say what is wrong. You might suggest that the person goes on a break or chills out. It mightn't necessarily be what you have done on the person, it could be coming from anywhere, but I feel if you have conflict in the room then the conflict will come out in the room, the children can sense the atmosphere.

(Interview Participant 3)

It is important that staff members work together because it wouldn't be fair on the other members of staff, unless there is a problem, for example, if you have a member of staff with a sore back, you would like that member of staff to tell you or I'm having a bad day, you have to be approachable and open – you will do the job yourself.

(Interview Participant 5)

In the above data participants identified the importance of nurturing relationships within the setting. Participants described the importance of their relationships with their colleagues and the ways in which they work together. Participant 3 emphasised the importance of empathy towards other staff members who are experiencing difficulties and also the importance of dealing with conflict in a positive manner. In consideration of individual needs within the team a collective approach to daily tasks was described by participant 5.

Nurturing relationships are extended equally to students on work placement.

I try to make sure that they [students] get to do as much as possible, not just wash paint pots but to work and interact as much as possible with the children.

(Interview Participant 1)

I like to support students by encouraging them, approaching them nicely – supervising them in a way that they gain independences, for example let them take a group of four children for an activity rather than a big group so that they can gain confidence.

(Interview Participant 3)

Staff members viewed the support of students as an important aspect of their work. Participants in the above data articulated nurturing students by ensuring they have appropriate experiences that build the student's confidence.

Nurturing capital: tertiary care relations, solidarity within the community

This theme embodies as outlined in Chapter 3, Lynch *et al's* view of how tertiary care relations cement relations of solidarity within communities. Lynch *et al* (2009) state that 'the emotional work involved in maintaining bonds of solidarity and care is fundamental to the fabric of society and political life' (p.47).

A lot of the grandparents know me they feel better when they know staff, a few have come up to me and said that they're happy that they know someone working in the crèche, especially the baby room. They would know me and my family we have lived here all our lives.

(Interview Participant 2)

I arranged an outing for a Sunday group that I do voluntary work with. I had to make sure that all the men and women that came on the trip had their safe guarding trust done. Training and work experience has helped me with the different groups that I work with in the community you can inform different volunteers of the procedure and raise awareness of child protection issues.

(Interview Participant 3)

From the above data participants described how they extend their skills and training beyond their working environment to benefit the community. Participant 2 articulated solidarity with grandparents, who feel more secure in the fact that they know staff who live within the community. Participant 3 described how she

has created an awareness of child protection issues for different voluntary groups working with children within the community.

Leadership styles

In this section the participants described the dominant characteristics of their leadership styles. As outlined in chapter 2, the evidence presented within this research corresponds with Rodd's findings of leadership styles within ECCE.

I would rather everyone work the same in the room there shouldn't be any differences, just because you are room leader doesn't mean that you are higher up, everyone is working the same.

(Interview Participant 1)

I feel that staff need to be better trained. They may have their level 5 finished but they still might not play with the children. For example, they don't get down to the children's level, if the children are at the water tray, the staff should put their hands in too. We should be interacting and playing all the time. I am doing it, so I'm hoping that the staff picks up on that.

(Interview Participant 2)

Keep them [staff] informed keep everyone informed communicating helps keep them motivated. Planning together is important so that the children's needs are met. Communication is important so that everyone knows what is expected.

(Interview Participant 3)

I don't look at myself as the leader, we work as a team. As leader you have more of a say, not a say but more of a lead on what happens in the room. I would always look for someone else's opinion. I am laid-back, I will do what I need to do but I won't say that is not the right way to do something, I wouldn't stand over someone and tell them it is wrong. If there was something I seen that I didn't like, I would say. If anyone had a problem with the way I lead then I'd like them to tell me. I wouldn't like to think I was bossy.

(Interview Participant 4)

I would describe my style as laid- back, I let people have their own say and their own ideas and thoughts. You need to be patience and flexible.

(Interview Participant 5)

All participants expressed their leadership styles as a collaboration process with shared intentions with other members of staff as opposed to a hierarchy of

roles. The leaders described themselves as working interdependently with all staff members as opposed to working on an individual basis. The importance of including everyone's opinion and ideas was emphasised by all participants. Furthermore Participant 3 identified communication and the inclusion with the whole team as a motivator for staff. Role modelling was identified by Participant 2 as an approach to support less experienced staff. Overall the data reflects a collective ethos within the service.

Lifelong learning

Solly's (2003) research findings indicated that early childhood practitioners identify lifelong learning as a personal strength of effective leaders. The benefits of participating in adult education courses were identified by staff.

I was in the middle of doing my level 6 when the position came up and that helped me get the job.

(Interview Participant 4)

I did my level 6 [FETAC] and I got room leader. The level 6 helped me get room leader it was part of the requirement.

(Interview Participant 5)

Participants 4 and 5 acknowledged that further training had enabled them to advance their careers within the setting. In the section below staff identified other benefits.

Doing the level 6 gives more of an insight into making a policy work. Doing a policy as part of an assignment and how to make it work with team members, it made more sense.

(Interview Participant 4)

Training has helped since I started in childcare especially dealing with conflict has changed say if a child was fighting with another child – you get down to their level and ask what's the problem how are we going to solve this. When I first started in the 1990, the practice was to have a naughty step or time out.

Child protection has changed a lot so training helps staff to keep up with all the changes. I finished level 6 last year; training helped me become more confident you know how to deal with issues. It was filling out the

referral form [a requirement of an assignment re: child abuse]. I hadn't done that before in practice that would help me if I have to do it for real. It gave me more confidence. What would you do if a parent with a couple of drinks came to collect their child? I would find that hard to deal with. We did a role play so it did help me think about what I would do if the situation arises.

(Interview Participant 3)

Adult education was recognised as influential in the development of participant confidence, particularly in dealing with situation of child abuse. Additionally, adult education has enabled participants to enhance their practice, dealing children's challenging behaviour positively and the development of policies within a team.

Experiential Learning

Throughout the interviews all participants referred to experiential learning. Using Kolb's model of experiential learning to map the participants' learning experience, it is noted that concrete experiences can be a stimulated experience developed especially for a learning situation, such as a case study or role play or a learners experimenting with the skills to be learnt, or this could be a real life or work place experience that the learner has encountered.

... we learnt practical things, practical is good you need lots of practical experiences.

(Interview Participant 2)

... what would you do if a parent with a couple of drinks came to collect their child I would find that hard to deal with. We did a role play so it did help me think about what I would do if the situation arises.

(Interview Participant 3)

... it was filling out the referral form, I hadn't done that part before. I never did it in practice before that would help me if I have to do it for real

(Interview Participant 3)

In the section below, Participant 4 reflects on how learning from previous experiences can be adopted for in different situation. In Kolb's learning cycle, as outlined by Fenwick (2003), 'the learner applies the new learning through active experimentation. The learner asks what will I do next time? How will I adopt this principle for other contexts? The new principle is tested out in similar situations, then in different situations and the learner continues to revise and reshape the learning based on what happens through experimenting with it' (p. 46).

I was very panicky at the start but now when I come across a situation, it is like one situation I dealt with last year, not exactly the same but I know I can deal with it. It's about confidence and experience if you have experienced a situation sorta similar you can deal better with it the next time around.

(Interview Participant 4)

From the data gathered it is evident that there are many benefits to experiential learning. Also that staff reflect continually as a means to improving their practice and developing their confidence. Schon (1983) talks of learning as reflective practice. However, Michelson (1996) notes that 'the learning process of reflection presumes that knowledge is extracted and abstracted from experiences by the processing mind. This ignores the possibility that all knowledge is constructed with power laden social processes' (p. 34).

Critical thinking

Critical perspectives as previously discussed in Chapter 3, such as Friere, hooks and Giroux centre power as the core issue in experience. By naming power ways and means open up to resist oppressive beliefs and social structures. With resistance the learner can become more open to unexpected possibilities for work, life and development.

Social and legal issues [module on supervision in childcare level 6] gave me more insight into government policies. I think that Childcare worker should be more aware of social policy. There could be a lot more awareness of it. More could be done to get childcare workers involved in policies. There needs to be more training to bring awareness back to the service.

(Interview Participant 4)

Despite the benefits of reflecting on practice, Participant 4 identified the need for childcare workers/EYE to be more aware of other structures that impact on ECCE, such as social policy. She also located education as the site for the development of awareness of these structures.

Personal development: confidence and assertiveness

Participant discussed their lack of confidence and assertiveness which they located as an internal problem. Participant 2 gives her account of a two different personal development courses as strategies to overcome the issues. The development and issues surrounding personal development in Ireland were previously discussed in Chapter 3.

The position came up of room leader in each room. I was part time; the position was full time, I really wanted full time work that's why I went for the position of room leader. I didn't expect to get the position; I didn't think I was ready for something like that yet.

(Interview Participant 4)

You can get your confidence knocked about right – someone might say something, you think am I fit for this. I've just looked back to a course I did. I have this blue thing on my watch [a piece of blue tac on the strap of her watch] I touch it to remind myself that I am worth more than that.

Maybe I need to more assertive. I can't do that, do you learn to be assertive? I don't think so. I have been to assertiveness training. When I related to the course it made me sad. So I left the course. I wasn't assertive enough for him [tutor] I wasn't assertive enough in my job at the time [previous job]. Maybe you don't want to learn all those things.

(Interview Participant 2)

A possible reason for this experience may relate to the facilitator not recognising his own power in the teaching/facilitation relationship. According to Ryan (2001), 'any exploration of agency in personal development must begin with recognition of the power dynamics embedded in the personal development process itself. The facilitator is in a more powerful position than the group members by virtue of their expertise, qualification, status, position, consequently the group assesses the facilitator's words, direction, questions, beliefs, and interpretation as more powerful than their own', (2001, p.113). Participant 2's actions to leave the course could be viewed as assertive as her needs within

the course were not being met. Furthermore, as previously discussed in Chapter 3, the epistemology stance of facilitators of personal development courses is crucial to the success of such courses in empowering women.

Barriers to education: access, funding and time.

Lifelong learning is a discourse mobilised as recalled from Chapter 3 within increasingly risky and unprotected work conditions that require women to work and train harder and longer while still undertaking full time home duties and self funding training. The following data reinforces the survey carried out by the DES (2009) as previously outlined in chapter 2. The training referred to are FETAC level 6 also Siolta and Aistear.

I would love to do level 6 in the evening but it is really expensive, €200 per module. There seems to be loads of things out there at the minute, Siolta and Aistear. I don't know much about Aistear. I don't think that there is much information out there on it. It is hard to go to training when it is on in the middle of the day. You have to do your job, if people are off or it doesn't suit you just can't go to it.

(Interview Participant 1)

I would have done training at night and evenings, it was difficult I was very tired. I had been out of school for about 20/30 years I left school when I was 15. It was difficult to go back to school to sit at a table and read books. I am planning on going back to do my level 6. You can't do everything, something has to give there was a time when I thought that I had to keep the house tidy and cook.

(Interview Participant 2)

I would like to go more in-depth, deeper into childcare do a degree, keep going. The problem is time, money and effort.

(Interview Participant 4)

Participants expressed money, time and effort as barriers to continuing with their education. Being released from work during the day to access training was identified by Participant 1 as a difficulty. Participant 2 describes the challenges of returning to education after a lengthy amount of time out of an education system that she had left at an early age. The impact of government frameworks to support the further development of ECCE such as Siolta and Aistear are seriously undermined if the barriers, as outlined by staff, are not overcome.

These barriers experienced by participants reflect as previously discussed in Chapter 3, Freire's phase 'interdict of the body'. Within this research it could be argued that numerous women working in ECCE are continually being alienated from the privileged space of education.

Investment

Lack of investment as outlined in Chapter 2, reflects Giroux's (2000) second myth as previously discussed in Chapter 3 which implicates the adults' 'unwillingness to take responsibility that childhood is a historical, social, and political construction enmeshed in many relations of power' (p.4).

It is not all about money, it's time as well. You can find resources for nothing. When you finish at 5.30 you don't feel like doing more, you'd love to.

(Interview Participant 4)

I would rate the building 5 out of 10 there is no staff room and the outdoor yard is too small.

(Interview Participant 5)

The need for investment in ECCE was identified by participants and also the constraints on staff in developing the service further. Although the service was established in 2005 and accessed significant capital investment through the EOCP, the inadequacies of planning for a working environment involving children and staff are highlighted by Participants 4 and 5. This data may well reflect Hayes' prophecy as outlined in Chapter 2, that the construction sector are the real beneficiaries of childcare investment programmes.

Analysis/Mapping: consulting with the children

Introduction

Using rhizoanalysis as outlined in Chapter 2 and 4, I linked the text gathered from the children to the award winning animation for preschool child in 2005, Peppa Pig (popular culture) and feminist theory. The children's text is bolded.

Popular culture: Peppa Pig

Peppa Pig is an anthropomorphic female pig. Peppa Pig lives with younger brother, George, Mummy and Daddy Pig. In the series, Fire Engine, Mummy pig is going to the 'Mummies Fire Engine Practice'. Daddy Pig laughs and states 'that is just an excuse for a cup of tea and a chat'. Daddy Pig then tells Mummy that he has a very important meeting with the Daddies. Mummy Pig responds stating, 'that is just an excuse for playing football'. Daddy Pig then tells Mummy that after the football match he will make a barbecue for the Daddies. Peppa and George go with Mummy Pig to the Fire Engine Station. When they enter the station they are greeted by all the Mummies having tea and a chat. The emergency phone rings. However, it is Daddy Pig wanting to know where the tomato ketchup is. Mummy Pig tells Daddy Pig to be careful lighting the barbecue, Daddy Pig response by saying, 'don't worry us Daddies know all about barbecues'. The Daddies proceed to set the barbecue on fire and have to call the fire engine. The Mummies leave the fire engine station to the chorus of 'Mummies to the rescue'. The Mummies put out the fire. Daddy Pig states 'thank you for rescuing us" Miss Rabbit responds by saying 'no problem it's all part of the Mummies fire engine service' (Peppa pig-fire engine).

Refer to appendix for further information.

Consultation with children

An art activity was facilitated with four children aged 3-4 years, attending the preschool service within the setting. The children were introduced to the theme *People who work in our Crèche* and the art materials. Crèche is the term used by children, parents and staff to describe the service. The art materials included wooden spoons, glue, glitter, different textured material and different types of googly eyes. The wooden spoons represented the people who work in crèches.

John (male): Can I have those eyes? (referring to googly stick on eyes)

Adults: These eyes?

John: No not those ones, can I have the girl eyes?

The adult passed the sheets with all the googly eyes over to John. *John chooses a set of eyes with long eyelashes. John sticks the eyes on the spoon.*

Adult: Why do you want girl's eyes?

John: Because only girls work in crèche, not boys.

Adult: I think boys can work in crèche too

Mary and Ann (females): No John is right; they can't; only girls can.

At this point in the consultation with the children their focus changed to another activity. This was respected as children have their own play agendas. The next section identifies the themes as well as mapping the text from the children to the animation Peppa Pig and feminist theory.

Long lashes: gendered characteristics

During the consultation with the children John makes clear that he wants the eyes with the long lashes for his wooden spoon.

John (male): Can I have those eyes? (referring to googly stick on eyes)

Adults: These eyes?

John: No not those ones, can I have the girl eyes?

John chooses a set of eyes with long eyelashes. John sticks the eyes on the spoon.

John appeared to identify the googly eyes with the long eyelashes as girls' eyes which he then used to decorate his spoon. This may indicate John's association of long eyelashes with stereotypical external characteristic used to identify female categories. In a recent report on gender stereotyping the role of television in constructing of gender is explored.

Even non-gendered imaginary characters – such as creatures and animals are considered 'naturally' to be male or female, unless they are specially marked as females through a process of sexualising their appearance e.g. hair ribbons, long lashes, coloured lips, short skirts.

(Lemish, 2008, p.58)

All of the adult female characters in Peppa Pig are marked with extra long black eyelashes, while the children and Daddies have no eyelashes. Lemish points out that television, as general rule defines men by their action and in contrast women by the appearance. Lemish (2008) states that, 'the external appearance of women is still perceived as the most central characteristic of a woman's essence' (p.58).

Girls can, boy can't: a gendered division of labour

In the next section of the conversation John expresses his view that only females can work in crèches. John has never had any other experience within ECCE, as the staff are all female.

Adult: Why do you want girl's eyes?

John: Because only girls work in crèche, not boys.

Adult: I think boys can work in crèche too

Mary and Ann (females): No John is right; they can't; only girls can.

The characters and scripts within Peppa Pig further construct male and female categories in terms of difference. The animation reflects the social construction of female and male essential natures in the recreational activities of the

Mummies and Daddies. The Mummies drink tea and have a chat while all the Daddies play football and have a barbecue. Feminist poststructuralism, according to Ryan(2001), 'sees the categories of female and male as socially constructed and rejects the idea that human beings have essential natures, including essential gendered natures' (p.9).

The children have reflected the dominant hegemonic discourse of gender in what they define as legitimate knowledge of male and female jobs. This defined legitimate knowledge goes unchallenged by the feminisation of the ECCE workforce and is reinforced by dominant media messages.

Conclusion and implications

This analysis brings into focus the multiple layers of how the child might forge their gender identity and attitudes. From a rhizomatic perspective,

...we can never be gendered in a fixed and final way; instead we are always becoming gendered as fashions, expectations, experiences, values, beliefs, opportunities and desires associated with genders change over time and between cultures and geographies.

(Mac Naughton,2005, p.121)

This mapping of meaning allows a more complex picture of both the internal and external world of the child, which is surrounded by dominant discourses of gender. New meaning was produced by framing the data from the children within feminist theory and popular culture rather than the traditional frame of development psychology.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter seeks to draw conclusions and make recommendations from the key arguments in this research; *Exploring aspects of the relationship between gender and leadership in early childhood care and education: Towards an engaged feminist pedagogy of adult education*. Implications and recommendations for adult educators and early childhood studies are drawn from the data gathered and theories explored. This section outlines how this thesis demonstrates a working example of leadership in action. Options for further research are offered. Finally, a conclusion to this thesis is presented.

Exploring aspects of gender in early years: disrupting dominant discourses

To summarise, using the tool of discourse analysis this research shows how the central premise of the dominant discourse: *women are natural care givers* is deployed within ECCE. The impact of the dominant discourse identified within the research includes the feminisation of the workforce, low status and poor working conditions. This thesis identifies elements of the discursive climate surrounding the phenomena of an all female workforce such as a *caring identity*, *men are not natural care givers* and wider society's perceptions that women are natural caregivers. As outlined in Chapter 3, this research illuminates hooks' argument that sexist stereotyping of men influences cultural perceptions about female identity. The held perceptions regarding men working in ECCE reflects our servitude to hegemonic discourses within a patriarchal system. Ryan (2010) suggests 'in accepting and working with the experiences of contradictions, we can learn to question and disrupt and create new discourses (classnotes). The disruption of the dominant discourse that women are born natural care givers may also be complicated by the investment as the data suggests for women in a caring identity.

The deep ambivalence within our culture in relation to the care and education of young children has found expression in the working conditions of ECCE. Reflecting Lynch *et al's* (2009) view 'the low status and high demands of care

generate a social distinction between care commanders and care providers that is deeply implicated in the oppression of women and also in relation to class, ethnicity and international migration' (p.53). It could be viewed that ECCE is a by product of the need to fulfil the labour markets defined by a feminised workforce who are the care providers. The indifference to the fact that other public spheres of life could not function effectively without ECCE services is reflected in the working conditions of staff and lack of public investment. This research reinforces the need for public policy as identified by Lynch *et al* (2009), 'to move from working with a concept of the person that centres on the economic, political and cultural actor in the public sphere, to one that recognizes that people as profoundly dependent and interdependent not only in the personal sphere but also the public sphere' (p.38).

New ways of being: counter-hegemonic discourses

International and national comparisons found that ECCE in Ireland is at the early stages of development which lags behind other EU countries. However, this research, relying on Gramsci's contributions to the concept of hegemony and counter hegemony, indicates that a learning community is evolving within ECCE. This learning community is characterised by the essential human quality of nurturing, thereby laying a strong foundation for the advancement of ECCE. Furthermore, this model of co-operation and solidarity indicates counter-hegemonic moments within dominant discourses of economic rationalities and individualism. Therefore, this collective approach offers possibilities for a more loving, 'care-rich' civil society which embraces social justice and democracy.

The tools of an engaged feminist pedagogy

This thesis illuminates the need for professionals working in the sector to develop conceptual tools to critically think about the powers of the systems in which they are deployed. This research proposes, as described by hooks in Chapter 3, an engaged feminist pedagogy of adult education as a means to support leaders within the ECCE workforce to become empowered and emerge at grass roots' level.

The diversion from developmental psychology within this research demonstrates how poststructural frameworks could be applied to the field of ECCE. The use of rhizoanalysis, set within Connell's taxonomy of gender relations illuminates the dominant hegemonic discourses of gender, which are considered legitimate knowledge for the children attending the service. It simultaneously demonstrates the use of rhizoanalysis as a tool for critically thinking about the structural powers in which we are deployed. The mapping of data gathered from the children to feminist theory reflects me and my choices in making meaning as oppose to producing meaning based only on the child. Deeply influenced by my own personal learning experience while carrying out this research as outlined in Chapter 1, I strongly advocate for the reform of early childhood studies. This research reinforces calls from Moss, Dalhberg and Mac Naughton for early childhood studies to include other forms of academic disciplines. As pointed by Mac Naughton,

... despite Foucault's deep and continuing influence in diverse fields of study, early childhood students rarely meet Foucault's work, or the work of poststructuralist thinkers.

(Mac Naughton, 2005, p.5)

The inclusion of other academic disciplines alongside developmental psychology has the potential to embed Freire's concept of consciousness-raising, revealing interlocking systems of oppression and how we allude to them. Within the research, participants described skills of critical reflections that related to their own practice. The need for more awareness regarding social policy and the implication for ECCE was identified by Participant 4. A politicised education within early childhood studies, which introduces tools such as discourse analysis and rhizoanalysis has the potential to widen the learner's capacity to *read their world* and lead to transformative action. Previous research confirms that

... becoming poststructural reflective often provokes educators to rethink and deepen their understandings of equity and its possibilities in their work by radicalising their understanding of power and knowledge in early

childhood institutions. In turn, this radicalisation drives efforts to find new ways to act for equity.

(Mac Naughton, 2005, p.5)

Additionally, this research reinforces the need for the conceptualisation of childhood to become a priority for feminist theory. This research concurs with Burman *et al* (2010) for feminists to 'challenge the gender free and anti-feminist paradigm of northern childhood studies' (p.237). In politicising early childhood studies I believe that it would also be essential to challenge interlocking systems of gender, race and class. As pointed out by hooks (2003), 'both the anti-racist struggle and the feminist movement worked to create locations for academic study so that an unbiased approach to scholarship and learning would not only be legitimized in schools and university settings, but would act as a catalyst to transform every academic discipline' (p.46).

Furthermore Ryan (2001) believes if personal development courses draw on 'feminist poststructuralist theory, it is capable of challenging the gender status quo by demonstrating that gender differences are produced and thus available for modification' (p.129). If early childhood studies draws on feminist poststructuralist theory, as recommended by this research, a twofold effect may occur. Firstly, women and men working in a feminised workforce could experience a consciousness-raising/praxis form of education. Secondly, a nurturing dimension of education that would support a collaborative style of leadership. However, it is important to be mindful, as identified by Ryan, and previously discussed in Chapter 3, of the need for feminist/politicised facilitators who are able to incorporate social analysis, radical politics and feminism into courses. The next section outlines how this thesis demonstrates a working example of leadership in action, which includes my attempt, as the researcher, to incorporate social analysis, radical politics and feminist theory into my practice as an adult educator.

Leadership within an engaged feminist pedagogy

By applying knowledge from my academic position this thesis attempts to overcome Giroux's third myth of 'disinterested scholarship', as outlined in Chapter 3. Using conceptual tools such as discourse analysis and rhizoanalysis I have attempted to fulfil my role as a critical educator in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Critical educators need to address what it means to exercise authority from their own academic locations and experiences while assuming the challenge of putting knowledge in the service of a more realized democracy.

(Giroux, 2000, p.27)

To ensure successful reform of early childhood studies, I believe as outlined by Giroux, that adult educators within these programmes must assume the role of leadership and commit to making knowledge more meaningful.

If critical educators are to make a case for context-specific nature of teaching – a teaching that not only negotiates difference but takes seriously the imperative to make knowledge meaningful so that it might become critical and transformative - they must expand curricula to include those elements of popular culture that plays a powerful role in shaping the desires, needs and identities of students.

(Giroux, 2000, p.133)

The participants within this research conveyed their desires to have practical learning experiences. Expanding the curricula of early childhood studies to include feminist poststructuralist theory may also fulfil the needs of EYEs to part take in practical learning experiences. As this research demonstrates conceptual tools such as discourse analysis and rhizoanalysis have the potential to ensure that the process of meaning making becomes critical and transformative. Within adult education, an engaged pedagogy, as described by hooks, may be achieved through the consideration of the desired preference of EYEs for practical learning experiences.

Recommendations for further research

I would recommend for further research the intersection of gender and class within the ECCE workforce. To disrupt this dominant discourse further I would recommend more research into how the few men that work in ECCE have overcome the barriers outlined in this research. I would recommend further research to explore this model of leadership by including a number of case studies within ECCE settings. The research indicates participant's commitment to lifelong learning; however a major concern is the barriers to accessing education and training. Although the workforce development plan has not been completed the discussion paper did recognise these issues. I would recommend a consultation process within local communities including the ECCE services, VECs and other training providers to identify a range of possibilities in overcoming these barriers. There also needs to be a lobby group to ensure funding is sought for these programmes. I would recommend further studies which would map meaning in ECCE services using the application of rhizoanalysis, for instance to class and race. Furthermore, pedagogy practices within the ECCE setting could be further examined through the application of discourse analysis. Another recommendation from this research would be a further study to identify the way forward in reforming early childhood studies. A further recommendation of this study is to present the findings of this research to advocacy services for ECCE, EYEs and adult educators working in the field of early childhood studies in Ireland.

Conclusion

In conclusion, through the creation of this thesis, I, the researcher have demonstrated the capacity for leadership in both the field of ECCE and adult education. This thesis has truly fulfilled its ambition to highlight the potential within ECCE. It also provides a platform for women working in ECCE to voice their concerns, needs and desires. It examines the discursive climate in which women and children within the ECCE setting are deployed. It identifies the occurrences of counter-hegemonic discourses such as nurturing capital and collaborative leadership style within a learning community. One of the main implications from this research is the addition of other academic disciplines

within programmes of early childhood studies. It also deduces the need for politicised educators in the field of early childhood studies who engage with nurturing the souls of their students. Positioning early childhood studies within a poststructural feminist paradigm has the potential to broaden the conditions for the production of meaning making. I believe that this positioning of early childhood studies is paramount for leaders within the field of ECCE to become empowered and emerge at grass roots' level. Broadening the conditions for the production of meaning making has the potential to extend the learning beyond the classroom into the ECCE service. By embracing power and using it knowingly, EYEs could develop policies and practices in a broader context of social justice. Additionally, this strategy has the potential to fulfil the ambitions of radical adult education in continuing to keep the idea of justice at the fore while struggling collectively in many different sites to restructure society in the interests of expanding the possibilities of democracy.

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APPENDIX 1

Guidelines for Ethical Practice

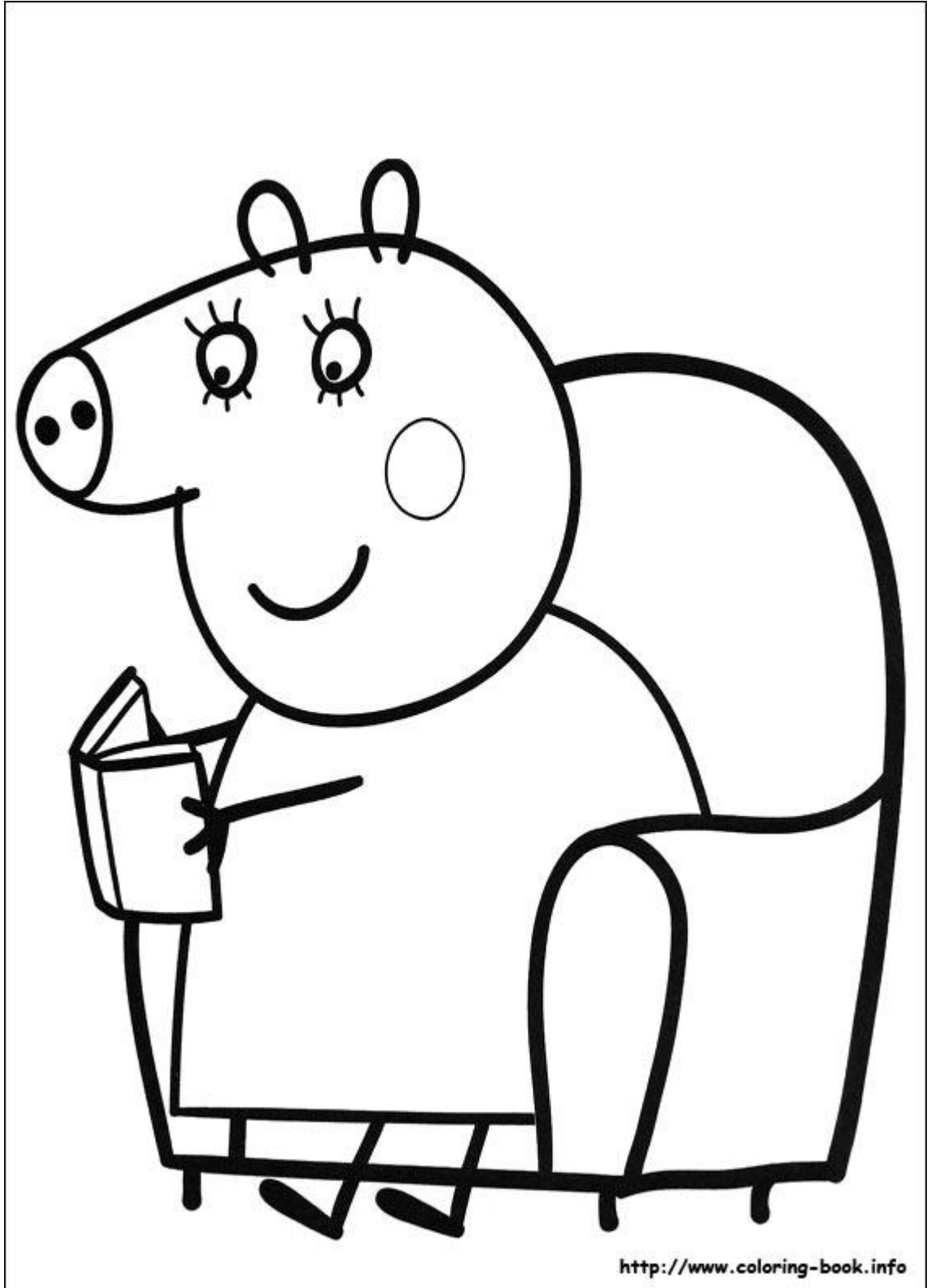
- will be informed, in a way that is understandable to them, of the nature and purpose of the research, of their right to withdraw from the research process at any stage and of potential uses of the research undertaken
- have the right to confidentiality
- will be consulted on all aspects of the research process and provided with the results and recommendations from the research in a way that is understandable to them

The following ethical issues will be adhered to during the consultation process with the children

- will be conducted in a safe and appropriate environment – the preschool setting with the support of trained staff
- sufficient information about the nature of the research will be provided to parents/guardians to enable them to provide informed consent.
- written consent will be obtained from parents/guardians
- children will be given the opportunity to decline to take part, even though a parent/guardian has given consent on their behalf
- the process will use language that is sensitive to the needs and feelings of the age group
- children and parents/guardians will be informed of any recordings, monitoring, and observations during the interview

APPENDIX 2

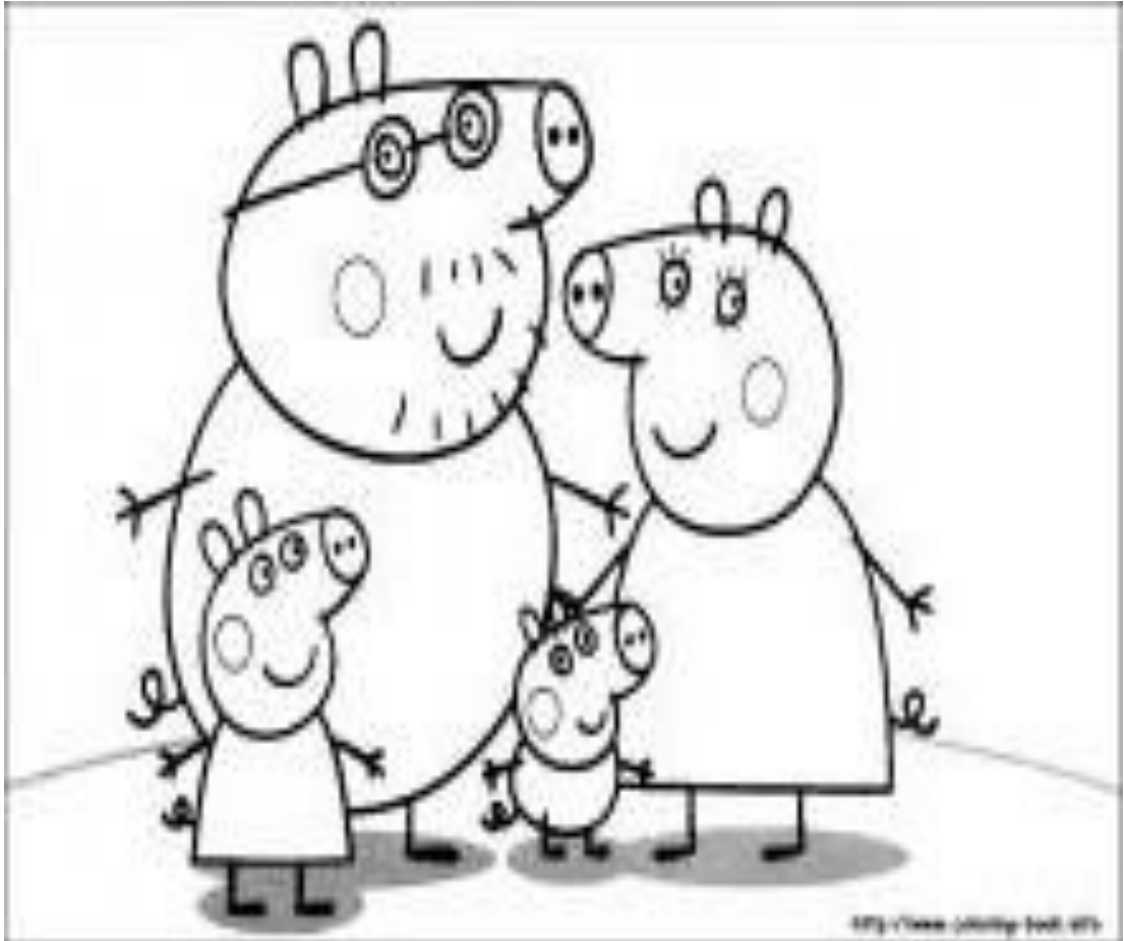
Mummy Pig



<http://www.coloring-book.info>

APPENDIX 3

Peppa Pig, George, Mummy and Daddy Pig



APPENDIX 4

Consultation with children: Art materials used including googly eyes

