

Challenging the 'Truths' of Early Childhood Education: The Construction of Free Kindergartens as Alternative Educational Spaces within Progressive and Economic Discourses

Ms Sandra M Wong

Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University

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This paper reports on the work in progress of a 'history of the present' of early childhood education and care in NSW that examines the emergence of Free Kindergartens at the turn of the twentieth century, through contemporaneous texts, such as pamphlets, newspaper articles, Parliamentary debates and annual reports. It is contended that, within the discourses of *Progressivism and Economy*, Free Kindergartens were constructed as alternative education spaces for working-class children younger than six years of age, in multiple ways, as education reform, social reform and cost prevention.

In the last decade there has been an increasing interest amongst many scholars in critically questioning the concepts, practices and theories underlying early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Alloway, 1997; Bloch, 2000; Goncu & Becker, 2000; James & Prout, 1997; Lubeck, 2000; Soto & Swadener, 2002). They have examined the ways in which power operates through the discursive practices of schooling, and have shown how ECEC has contributed to silencing, domination and marginalisation of bodies, particularly those of women and children, and those from the working-class and minority groups (Cannella, 1997; Canella, 1999; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Goffin, 1996; Jipson, 1998; Lero, 2000; Lubeck, 1996). This work has challenged many within the field of ECEC to question the assumptions that underlay ECEC practices. One such assumption, which is the focus of this paper, is that ECEC services for young children should be separate from those for older children.

In New South Wales this assumption underlies a disparity in the provision of education, which disadvantages younger children. In NSW it is the State's responsibility to provide education, free of charge, for all children aged six to 15 years, although children as young as four and half may commence kindergarten class. Yet, ECEC for children from birth to six years, is provided within a diverse array of, predominantly, fee charging services. This separation between the education of older and younger children is rarely questioned. Why? Because the concept that education for young children should be separate from that of older children is so intimately interwoven with the dominant construct of early childhood education in NSW, that it has become a 'truth' of practice. But, as will be shown below, this 'truth' arose from historically contingencies.

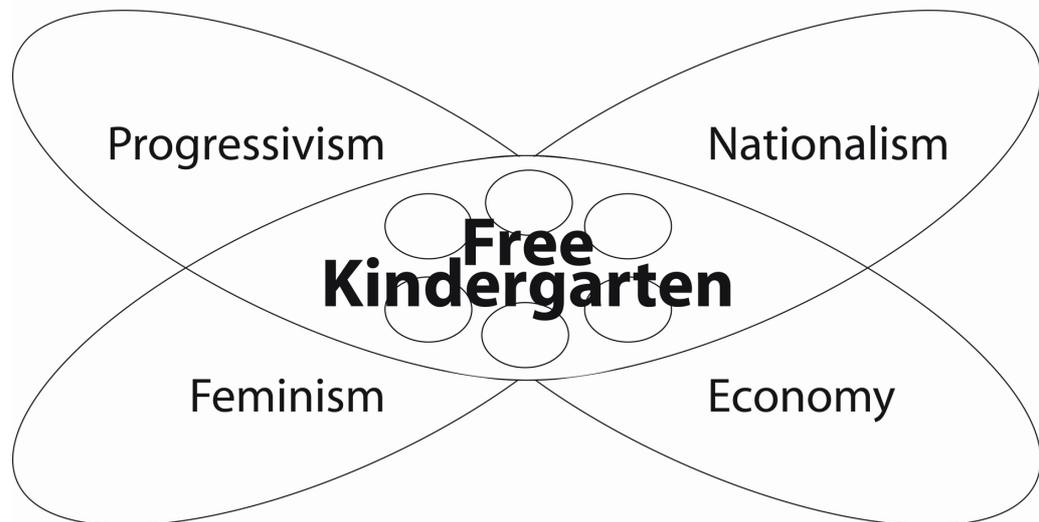
This paper reports on initial findings of a "history of the present" (Foucault, 1979, p.31) of ECEC in NSW. It is concerned with challenging the naturalness of a separation between education for older and younger children. The paper explores how the first examples of separate ECEC services in NSW, Free Kindergartens, were constituted within historically contingent discourses. It examines how two particular discourses, *economy* and *progressivism*, gave rise to the construction of Free Kindergartens, in multiple ways, as *education reform*, *social reform*, and *cost prevention*. Tensions between these constructs will be explored.

The paper begins with a definition of 'history of the present' and a discussion of its usefulness for exploring contemporary practices. This is followed by a brief history of the provision of education for young children in NSW. Next the paper explores how discourses surrounding an economic recession resulted in the exclusion of children under six from public schools, thereby creating the exigency for alternative educational services for young children. The paper then addresses how the discourses of progressivism and economy gave rise to multiple constructs of Free Kindergartens.

History of the Present

The Foucaultian notion of 'history of the present' (Foucault, 1979, p.31) is a valuable way of unmasking the hidden assumptions underlying ECEC practices. 'History of the present' is concerned with understanding and problematising contemporary practices, such as ECEC, through historical analysis. By examining the historically constituted nature of practices "the self-evidence or naturalness of the present-day practice" (Kendall, 2001, p.26) is challenged. It "makes the familiar strange" enabling that which was taken-for-granted to be politicised and problematised (Baker, 2001, p.29).

History of the present contends that practices emerge as eruptions in the discursive field (Dreyfuss & Rabinow, 1983). As discourses shift, 'spaces' are created within which new ways of operating may be constituted. In this paper, the constitution of the practice of ECEC in NSW has been traced back to the establishment of Free Kindergartens in 1895. This event marked "a moment of discontinuity - a moment when something new emerge[d]" (Kendall, 2001, p.26). It heralded the beginning of a new system of education, specifically aimed at young, poor children. To identify the discourses within which Free Kindergartens emerged, contemporaneous texts such as newspaper articles, Parliamentary debates, pamphlets, reports and books, have been examined. In this way, the historically contingent nature of the constitution of ECEC, as separate education services, is made visible. To date four discourses have been identified *Progressivism, Economy, Nationalism and Feminism*.



The construction of Free Kindergartens within two of these discourses, progressivism and economy, will be discussed in some detail later in this paper. But first, a brief history of the provision of education for children younger than six years is outlined below.

The Provision of Education for Young Children in NSW prior to 1894

Since the establishment of the NSW colony there had been provisions made for the care and education of children (Walker, 1964). As well as private, fee-charging schools, there were a number of philanthropic, and church establishments which provided education for poor children. There was a tradition, particularly amongst the working class, of very young children attending these schools. Early colonial schools, for instance, admitted children from as young as eighteen months (Walker, 1964) although the common age span was from between three to twelve years (Snow, 1989). In the mid nineteenth century young children accounted for a high proportion of the school population. Indeed, according to Snow (1989) in 1869, forty per cent of children enrolled in NSW public schools were seven years or younger (Snow, 1989).

Despite the fact that many young children were attending schools, when the Public Instruction Act was introduced in 1880, it did not reflect this practice, as the Act made it compulsory only for children aged between six and 14 to attend school. Yet, the introduction of the Act did not *exclude* young children. Many children below statutory age continued to attend Public Schools after its implementation. This is illustrated by figures produced, in Parliamentary Debates by Carruthers (1893, p.6725) who claimed that, in 1893, 27, 879 children attending public schools in NSW were under six years of age, constituting one seventh of the school population. The exclusion of children under six did not occur until 1893, when the country was in the grip of an economic recession (Parliamentary debates, 1893, p.6282).

Economic Discourse and the Exclusion of Children Under Six Years from Public Schools

An economic recession in the 1890s created a climate of fiscal restraint. Consequently, the NSW Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the body responsible for providing schools, had great demands placed upon its limited budget. The introduction of compulsory schooling had meant that Government was obliged to provide schools, so that those required by law to attend, could do so (Parliamentary Debates, Suttor, 1893, p.6721). This required huge capital outlays, as the DPI had to build many new schools in which to accommodate children. An apparently effortless way to reduce public expenditure was to exclude children outside compulsory age. This is clearly reflected in a *SMH* report regarding the NSW Minister for Public Instruction, Mr Frank Suttor (February, 1, 1893, p.3)

In looking round to see in what direction he [Mr Suttor] might be forced ultimately to make a further saving, he saw that it would be in the direction of refusing to admit to the schools, children under 6 years of age. (Hear, hear.). Some of the schools were over-crowded owing to the attendance of children of 5, 4, and even 3 years of age

In April 1893, Suttor stated to parliament that "it is intended to decline to receive into the schools children below the age of 6 years" (Parliamentary Debates, 1893, p.6282).

The exclusion of young children was then, it seems, principally tied to the availability of funding. Kelly (1988) has argued that whilst education for children over six was recognised as a universal right, the provision of education for children under six was "conditional on the availability of surplus resources in times of prosperity" (Kelly, 1988, p.21). In the prosperous 1880s, education included and even expanded to meet the needs of children under six, and there were genuine attempts to reform education to make it more responsive to the needs of younger children. In the economic depression of the 1890s, when there was a reduction in public expenditure, the cost of education had to be curtailed, this was done at the expense of young children. But examination of the debates surrounding the exclusion of young

children from public schools reveals a much more complex picture. It will be shown below, that the economic and progressive discourses constructed 'young children' and 'early education' in multiple ways.

Economic Discourse: Constructing Children as 'Too young to learn'

To support arguments for the exclusion of children under six years, these children were constructed as 'too young to learn'. For instance, Barton said "Children below school age are incapable of receiving and retaining mental impressions of a definite kind" (1893, p.6736). Similarly, Black maintained that "it is not very much use endeavouring to educate the infant" (Black, Parliamentary Debates, 1893, p.6734). Likewise, during his many Ministerial visits to public schools, Suttor attempted to show how young children were not yet ready to learn.

At each of the schools visited Mr. Suttor made a point of interrogating the pupils in the infant classes in a kindly way. In almost every instance the replies were unsatisfactory. Many of the children were unaware of the fact that they had a second name, and were unable to inform the Minister of their birthdays. Mr. Suttor came to the determination that the investigations he made thoroughly justified the action which he had previously taken in ordering that children under six should not attend school (*SMH*, April 25, 1883, p.4).

This statement suggests that, because these children were unaware of their surname and age, they could not be expected to learn. Such limited questioning hardly seems a 'thorough justification' for excluding children. Would knowledge of age have been common amongst working-class children, who may possibly have never even celebrated their birthday?

But why, if it did not reflect the ages that children actually attended school, was six chosen as the age of compulsion? Snow (1989) has argued that the ages of compulsion were a reflection of the norms accepted by the legislators, men from the middle and upper classes. Children from these classes were likely to have been educated at home with a governess until they turned seven and only then start to attend school (Walker, 1964). Snow argues that those drawing up the legislation possibly determined that six was the youngest age at which children could be expected to learn. Similarly, Weiss (1993) has contended that the school starting age was constructed around a vision of the cosseted young middle-class child, unprepared to learn. Which, as Weiss (1993) points out, did not reflect the lived reality of many working-class children, who were highly likely to have contributed to the family economy well before the age of six.

Economic Discourse: Constructing Children as Vulnerable

A second means of supporting the economic arguments for excluding children under six was by constructing children as vulnerable. This can be seen, for example, in the following statement by Suttor, reported in the *SMH* (April, 11, 1893, p.5)

Sending young children to school does them no good, but that such a course is rather to their detriment ... owing to such close confinement the health of children of a tender age is injured.

Similarly, Melville declared "that to send it [a child 5 -6 years] to school any earlier only interferes with the development of the mind" (Parliamentary Debates, Melville, 1893, p.6745). Perhaps, by constructing children as vulnerable in the school setting, those in power could be seen to be dispensing their patriarchal duty. If young children were put at risk in this environment, then they should not be exposed to its dangers, but rather stay at home. This argument of course was probably based on a vision of the middle-class home, supposedly safe and nurturing. But for many poor children the home environment was probably a great deal less safe than school. At this time many families lived in abject poverty. There was high infant mortality and morbidity and many children were seriously injured in the home (McKellor, 1904). Furthermore, in many poor families both parents would have worked. The exclusion of young children from school would likely have meant that either a parent or an older sibling would now have to care for them. But, when concerns were raised both in parliament and in the press that this could result in older siblings forfeiting their education, the Minister's reply was less than sympathetic.

He [Mr Suttor] did not think it wise that the Public schools should be turned into nurseries or creches. (Laughter, and hear, hear). The objection raised to his proposal was that if they sent these babies home, their elder sisters would be kept at home to look after them; but even if the elder children were sometimes kept at home to look after the younger ones, it would be better than allowing the babies to occupy valuable space in Public schools. It would be cheaper to employ a lot of nurses to take the babies out in the public parks. (Laughter and hear, hear.). (SMH, February, 1, 1893, p.3).

So it seems it was considered better to keep older children at home, rather than have to pay to educate these 'babies' who took up 'valuable' space.

Economic Discourse: Constructing Early Education as an Unnecessary Expense

The education of children under six years, who were considered too young to learn, and who were not required by law to attend school, was constructed within the economic discourse as an additional, unnecessary, expense. It was argued that these children took up limited spaces meant primarily for children of compulsory age. Barton (Parliamentary Debates, 1893), for instance, argued that the acceptance of young children would result in "the crowding-out of children of school age by infants" (p.6736). Similar sentiments were expressed in the SMH (April 22, 1893, p.8)

In numbers of small schools throughout the country, where there is only scanty accommodation, children of school age shall be shut out, or doomed to pass their time in crowded buildings, to save parents the trouble of taking care of them [children under compulsory school age].

Indeed, the Minister declared that some schools were so overcrowded "the children were packed almost like herrings" (Parliamentary Debates, Suttor, 1893, p.6723). Of course one answer to the problem of overcrowding could have been for the DPI to provide larger, more commodious schools. As one Parliamentarian suggested "the proper remedy is to increase the accommodation" (Parliamentary Debates, Clark, 1893, p.6765). This suggestion, however, was met with derision and ridicule by many, who viewed any additional expenditure on buildings to accommodate young children as money "lavishly squandered" (Parliamentary Debates, Melville, p.6745) and "a wasteful expenditure" (Parliamentary

Debates, Barton, p.6737). For the majority of parliamentarians the exclusion of children under six was seen as a legitimate way of reducing expenditure in the DPI.

The debates regarding the exclusion of young children from public schools brought into question the role of the state in public education. Both sides of parliament seemed to have agreed that it was the role of the state to provide "the best primary education the state could give" (Parkes, 1983, p.6717) to ensure "an enlightened democracy" (O'Sullivan, 1893, p.6771). But arguments arose over the age at which the state should assume this responsibility. Those arguing against the exclusion of children under six, claimed it was the intention of the 1880 Act that the State educate all children - not just those between six and 14. But for many parliamentarians education for children below the age of compulsion was not considered to be a responsibility of the state, but rather the parents, and facilities for younger children were considered to be outside its parameters. This sentiment is reflected below.

Money granted for a school is not money granted for a creche; and when a school is made to resemble a creche by being crowded with infants below school age, the genuineness of an application for more accommodation should be tested (SMH, April, 14, 1893, p.4).

But there were those who argued that the exclusion of young children was a false economy. As will be seen, they argued that not only were children capable of learning, but that early education was essential to prevent future expenses.

Economic Discourse: Constructing Early Education as a Means of Preventing Cost

Several parliamentarians argued that education for young children was essential for protecting society against the cost of an 'untamed' youth. Curruthers (Parliamentary Debates, 1893, p.6729), for instance, cautioned that

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

Similarly, Black argued that education could prevent future criminality, stating "every tendency towards education is a tendency towards lessening the disposition to criminality" (Black, Parliamentary Debates, 1893, p.6751). In a like manner, one letter writer to the editor of the *SMH*, argued that schools provided a valuable service by "keeping young children off the streets and away from the contaminating influence of those who unfortunately are born criminals"; and was also "a blessing to thousands of hard-working mothers" (Citizen, *SMH*, August 4, 1893, p.3). This letter clearly attempts to construct schools as facilities for preventing children from engaging in criminal activity *and* as work related child care. But the letter bought a mocking reply the following day (Fugitive Notes, *SMH*, August 5, 1894, p.5).

There appears to be some confusion between an infant school and a *crèche*. The function of the infant school ... seems to be to teach, but this correspondent appears to think that it has something to do with supplying a place where hard-working

mothers may send their children during certain hours of the day to get them out of the way.

The article goes on to say that this is a "matter for the charitably-disposed ladies of their respective districts, rather than for the Minister of Public Instruction" (Fugitive notes, *SMH*, August 5, 1894, p.5). A clear distinction is being made here between what is seen as the role of the state and that which should more properly be provided by charitable organisations. Nevertheless, advocates for early education continued to argue that the education of young children was rightly the role of the state. These arguments appear to have emerged from what seems to be progressive discourse, this will be discussed further.

Progressive Discourse and the Construction of Education

Progressivism was a dominant discourse of the nineteenth century. This was a time of many scientific discoveries and technological changes. Progressivism was concerned with making the benefits, bought by this scientific knowledge, available to all, for the enhancement of society as a whole (Reese, 2001). Amongst many progressivists there was a heightened social consciousness, raising awareness of the disparity between the rich and poor (Reese, 2001). In particular, it was recognised that the living conditions and levels of education of the poor threatened social progress. In order to redress this disadvantage and to uphold democracy, progressivists lobbied for the provision of universally available social services, such as, hospitals, recreational facilities and particularly, education.

Progressive Discourse: Constructing Early Education as Enhancing Social Equity

Advocates for public education, such as Parkes, argued that education was a means of bringing about social equity. He contended that it was the intention of the Public Instruction Act of 1880, which he had drafted, "that the men of the future in receiving while children the best primary education the state should give them should be placed on equal footing, without regard to any condition in life" (Parkes, *Parliamentary Debates*, 1893, pp.6716 - 6717). He considered the exclusion of young children from public education "a great blow at the cardinal principles of the Public Instruction Act" (*Parliamentary Debates*, 1893, p.6719) that threatened its integrity. More contentiously, Schey argued that those who wished to exclude young children, did so because they feared a loss of power (*Parliamentary Debates*, 1893). He maintained that "the conservative class" were "casting aspersions on the system, because it does not enable them to keep hold on the masses they formerly had" (*Parliamentary Debates*, 1893, p.6763). By weakening public education the ruling class might retain control.

Parkes viewed the exclusion of young children as particularly disadvantageous for the children of the poor. He argued that the period from five to six years was one of "vital importance in the education of the children of the poor ... A year once lost in the education of a poor man's child can never be fully regained" (*Parliamentary Debates*, 1893, p.6719). Parkes' arguments for the importance of early education, particularly for poor children, seem to have been based on the recognition that for many working class children their experience with education was weighted heavily in the earliest years. Working class children of twelve and thirteen years were important contributors to the functioning and economy of the family. They were often required to assist with household chores or to seek paid employment. Even after the introduction of compulsory instruction, school attendance for older working-class children tended to be sporadic, particularly for girls, and it was common for these children to leave school before age fourteen (Davey, 1977). Their early departure from school placed increased importance on education in the early years. Excluding these children until the age of six was likely to have significantly reduced the amount of time they spent in school.

Consequently, the enforcement of the compulsory age was particularly disadvantageous for working-class children.

So, in the mid 1890s, several apparent contradictory constructions of young children and early education are evident. The economic discourse constructed young children as both fragile and incapable of learning, and early education as a waste of resources. These constructs dominated and legitimated the exclusion of young children from state education. The provision of early education was constructed as the role of philanthropists. Conversely, economic and progressive discourses constructed early education as an economic necessity and as a valuable means of bringing about social equity. It was in this shifting discursive environment that Free Kindergartens emerged.

The Construction of Free Kindergartens within Progressive Discourse

It was argued above, that within the progressive discourse, education was constructed as a valuable tool for bringing about social equity by bringing the benefits of education to the masses. As such, early education was regarded as particularly important for the young of the working-class. Progressive discourse thereby created a 'space' in which the construction of Free Kindergartens, as social reform, could emerge. But, as will be shown below, more than this, progressive educationalists were also concerned with bringing about educational reform.

Progressive Discourse: Free Kindergartens Constructed as Educational Reform

Despite the attendance of many young children, schools were, by and large, ill equipped to cater for their needs. They were cramped and confined, with children as young as three years of age sitting alongside their twelve year old peers (Walker, 1964). The curriculum, based on learning the 3Rs, focused on rote learning and memorisation and was largely unsuitable for young children (Walker, 1964). Progressive educators called for education to be reformed, to better meet the needs of younger students (Anderson, 1911).

There had been a number of attempts to establish schools that better catered for the needs of young children. In the United Kingdom in the early 1800s, a number of progressive educators had established infant schools, based on *Pestalozzian* principles. These ideas soon spread to NSW, where, beginning in the 1820s, infant schools began to be established (Walker, 1964). By the end of the 1880s there were infant departments in several public schools, as well as a number of model schools which had been established in order to train teachers in 'infant methods' (Walker, 1964). Notwithstanding the attempts of these schools to better meet the needs of young children, many schools continued to teach through drill.

By the late nineteenth century, a number of educationalists in NSW, expressed concern with what they saw as "flaws in the foundation on which the structure of general education was based" (Anderson, 1911, p.19). They also detected a complacency within the education system and a general apathy towards educational change - what Maybanke Anderson (1911), one of the female pioneers of Free Kindergartens, referred to as a "dull pool of unreflecting confidence" (p.19). These progressive educationalists became convinced of the benefits of Froebelian Kindergarten. Froebel had been the first to fully articulate the scientific study of children and philosophical arguments, into a workable, predictable early childhood pedagogy - the Kindergarten method (Froebel, 1885). Advocates of the Kindergarten argued that this method offered an opportunity to move away from "fact cramming, and repression" (Kindergarten Society, 1911, p.2) to a more "gentler pedagogy" (Reese, 2001, p.10). In 1895 they formed the Kindergarten Union, the principle objectives of which were:-

To set forth Kindergarten Principles. To endeavour to get those principles introduced into every school in New South Wales. To open Free Kindergartens wherever possible in poor neighbourhoods (Anderson, 1911, p.19).

The first two of these objectives clearly articulate that the aim of the Kindergarten Union was to bring about educational reform - it was not specifically aimed at children under six. However, the Kindergarten Union recognised that to bring about educational reform within the public school system was a difficult task.

There had been several attempts to introduce Kindergarten methods into public schools, and this was seen by some as a positive development. Several parliamentarians even commented on the value of the Kindergarten in debates in the House. Reid, for instance, referred to Kindergarten as "a system ... of teaching children of the youngest ages which seems in no way to distress their young minds, but, on the contrary, to produce the best results" (Parliamentary Debates, 1893, p.6740). Kindergarten was considered by Reid to have "converted what used to be a barbarous system of learning into a system of education which makes education a positive delight and a source of strength to those children who are taught by it" (Parliamentary Debates, 1893, p.6740). Similarly, Black stated that, whereas the teaching practices of the 1870s and 1880s resulted in a "deadening of the intellect", within Kindergarten children are "enabled there to attain a very high degree of development with a very slight strain" (Black, Parliamentary Debates, 1893, p.6752). A positive attitude towards Kindergarten is also reflected in a letter to the editor of the *SMH*, where one writer opined that the Kindergarten system created "happy-looking little scholars ... having their infantile intellects suitably developed in a healthy moral atmosphere" (LEX, *SMH* April 20, 1893, p.4). Nevertheless, attempts to introduce Kindergarten classes in public schools were, by and large, considered unsuccessful by the DPI, because they failed to produce measurable outcomes in terms of children's literacy and numeracy skills (Walker, 1964). Furthermore, as young children were to be excluded from schools, there was little need for Kindergarten classes.

The Kindergarten Union, faced with the challenge of implementing Kindergarten principles on "an unsympathetic world" (Anderson, 1911, p.19), had to launch their "little venture" (Anderson, 1911, p.19) on a population outside of the jurisdiction of the DPI. The young children of the poor, newly excluded from the public school system, provided an ideal population on which the experiment of Kindergarten could be practiced. The young children of the poor, being outside the parameters of state interest, posed little threat to established educational practices. Furthermore, it was likely that working-class parents were accustomed to sending their children to public school and, now that they could no longer attend public school, it was probable that Free Kindergartens would be accepted by the local community. As Anderson (1911), wrote fifteen years after Kindergarten Union was established

A cry for reform in education would have been at that time unheeded, but it was comparatively easy to arouse interest in the conditions of neglected children, and the imminent danger of larrikinism. To this day, of those who help to support the work of the Union, only a small minority understand kindergarten principles, while every casual visitor appreciates the happy intelligence of the children brought under their influence.

So, although a major goal of the Kindergarten Union was to bring about educational reform, in order to see Kindertartens established a different construct was required - Free Kindertartens as social reform.

Progressive Discourse: Free Kindertartens Constructed as Social Reform

The progressive discourse had constructed education as a means of bringing about social equity. This created a discursive space in which Kindertartens could be constructed as free, compensatory, education for the working-class. The NSW Kindergarten Union was aware of the work that had been done by Kindergarten Unions in the United States, in successfully establishing Free Kindertartens in disadvantaged areas. Following this model the NSW Kindergarten Union proposed to establish Free Kindertartens in the poor suburbs of Sydney. The children in these suburbs were considered vulnerable to the adverse effects of the social conditions in which they grew.

In many a back street, little children, dirty, neglected, poorly fed, the offspring of the poor, the vicious, or the ignorant, spend their lives in the gutter. They learn to prattle in foul language, and imitate the ways of vice even in their play (*no date, circa 1910, NSW Kindergarten Union*)

Poverty equaled neglect and ignorance and children growing up in this environment would surely learn corrupt behaviour. So they had to be removed from the influence of the mean streets and instilled with 'correct' values and taught 'appropriate' behaviour. The earlier this intervention the better, to steer these children away from vice. As one correspondent to the SMH put it "if we are to deal effectively with the larrikin pest, we must go to the nurseries" (Citizen, SMH, August 4, 1893, p.3). This desire for early intervention enabled Free Kindertartens to be constructed as educational services for young children that could intervene and ameliorate the effects of poor living conditions. As Anderson (1916) put it "the Free Kindertartens save them [the children] from the pollution of the streets, and teach them to love truth and honour" (p.5). Free Kindertartens could take children off the streets and remove them

all day from their sordid surroundings, and train them to love truth and purity. In every game they learn to practice kindness and courtesy: in every occupation their fingers are trained to deftness: while they learn to delight in patient industry. Justice and forbearance, charity and kindness are the every-day virtues of the Kindergarten, and they reach out beyond the children to the homes and the mothers and father Anderson (1916, p.6).

Free Kindertartens were therefore constructed as intervention programs which could transform the low bred working-class child into a virtuous and compliant body. But more than this, the Kindergarten was also a "centre for social work in the homes surrounding it" (Kindergarten Union, undated circa 1910s, p.3). Through the child, the Kindergarten could influence the practices of the family. By developing, in the children of the poor, sensibilities to dirtiness, and vulgarity which corresponded to those of the middle-class, the middle-class could change the ways of the poor, not by force, but in much more subtle ways.

But, even though they might be accepted by the local community, Free Kindergarten services, which did not receive any government funding, needed the financial support of wealthy patrons to operate. How was the Kindergarten Union to attract the funding essential

to operate these services? One way, was by operating within the dominant economic discourse and constructing Free Kindergartens as a cost preventative.

The Construction of Free Kindergartens within Economic Discourse

As has been discussed, the economic discourse was particularly dominant in the mid 1890s. This discourse was significant for the constitution of Free Kindergartens. Not only did it contribute to the exclusion of children under six from public schools, thereby producing a need for early childhood services, but it also provided arguments for the construction of Free Kindergarten. The importance of the economic discourse for the construct of Free Kindergarten is clearly expressed on the front cover of Kindergarten Union annual report 1899 -1900.

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

Free Kindergartens as Cost Prevention

Free Kindergartens were constructed within the economic discourse as a means of preventing the cost of crime. Children of the poor were constructed as potentially dangerous. This is reflected in a letter to the editor complaining "of the amount of damage to public and private property committed by children who run wild about the streets" (Citizen, SMH, August 4, 1893, p.3). The construction of children as dangerous, further legitimated the construct of Free Kindergartens as intervention. They could be constructed as a means of keeping these 'dangerous' children off the streets. But, not only were poor children constructed as dangerous in the immediate sense, if left to the vagaries of their social circumstances, they posed a threat in the future. They would become criminals and larrikins. Anderson (1916, p.5) suggests

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

Free Kindergartens were therefore constructed as essential to protect society

Free Kindergarten is a necessity for the child of the mean streets, and if we do not provide it for him, we may also have to keep him as a larrikin, a drunkard, a criminal, an anxiety and a disgrace, until he dies (Anderson, 1922, p.4).

By intervening early, Free Kindergartens could save the nation the unnecessary expense of the unproductive and non-compliant child. As Anderson (1911, p.22) put it

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

It is uncertain whether Anderson really believed in Free Kindergartens as a preventative for future crime, or whether she was using these financial arguments, as rhetoric, to attract more funding for the operations of Kindergarten Union. She may have hoped that arguments of 'law and order' and 'economy' would construct the work of the Kindergarten Union in a way that was more attractive to a wider section of the public. It has been suggested that Anderson was conscious of the power of media (Roberts, 1993) perhaps this was just shrewd propaganda. We see similar arguments being used today. Nevertheless, by constantly referring to young poor children as dangerous, in order to meet its own needs, the Kindergarten Union was complicit in reinforcing the notion of the 'dangerous child' - possibly to the detriment of those they were allegedly trying to help.

Although Free Kindergartens appear to have been established with a genuine desire to improve the education of working-class children, they nevertheless may have contributed to the marginalisation of young children from the parameters of free education. By providing alternative education spaces for young children, Free Kindergartens constructed early education as separate from that of older children. Education for young children was no longer provided as a right within the state funded system, but was instead to be provided by philanthropic organisations dependent on the charity of the middle and upper class.

Conclusion

Historical analysis of the constitution of ECEC is a valuable way to unmask its hidden, and therefore taken-for-granted truths. This historical analysis of the constitution of Free Kindergartens, has revealed that the construction of the first separate ECEC services in NSW emerged as a result of historical and social contingencies. The construction of the 'young child' and 'early education' within economic discourse led to the exclusion of children younger than six from the parameters of state education thereby creating the exigency for alternative educational spaces. The progressive and economic discourses created a space in which Free Kindergartens were constructed in particular ways, as educational reform, social reform and as means of preventing the expense of crime.

To recognise the historically constituted nature of the practice of ECEC is to know that it may have been otherwise. If it were not for the progressive and economic discourses of the late nineteenth century perhaps ECEC would not exist today as a separate field of education. Perhaps education for young children would be provided as part of a universally available system which did not discriminate on the basis of age.

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Author

Sandie Wong is a doctoral student at the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University.
Email: sandie@nextgraphic.com.au.

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