How do newly-qualified early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand critically reflect within constraints and possibilities of dominant discourses of early childhood teaching?

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Abstract
Early childhood practitioners' professionalism is a contested concept, with interpretations that include professionalisms based on qualifications, on accountability, on relational skills and on critical advocacy. Understandings of professionalism as situated in ecological frameworks rather than within individuals have led to the concept of a critical ecology, within which teachers critically reflect on and question professionalism at all levels of their professional ecosystem. Carmen Dalli has called for re-emergence of a critical ecology of the early childhood profession in Aotearoa New Zealand in challenging political contexts. This article explores two newly-qualified early childhood teachers' critical reflections about their subjectivities in a Master's thesis research study set in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the poststructural paradigm of this research, subjectivities comprise individuals' multiple, complex and dynamic self-understandings shaped by power relations within discourses. This article will draw on Michel Foucault's discourse theories to consider how these newly-qualified early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand critically reflect within constraints and possibilities of dominant discourses of early childhood teaching.

Keywords

Introduction
This article explores how two early childhood teachers critically reflect on their subjectivities as professional teachers. They were two of five newly-qualified early childhood teachers involved in a poststructural research study (Warren, 2012) investigating professional subjectivities. Data analysis using Foucault's discourse theories suggests that three dominant discourses of early childhood teaching shape participants' subjectivities: the authority discourse, the relational professionalism discourse, and the identity work discourse. I consider discourse analysis based on Foucault's theories as well as theoretical ideas about professionalism, critical reflection and critical ecology. In light of calls for early childhood teachers to become critically activist professionals (for example, Dalli, 2010; Moss, 2007), the article considers how these teachers critically reflect within constraints and possibilities of dominant discourses of early childhood teaching.

Early childhood professionalism: contested understandings
Early childhood professionalism may be viewed as a site of struggle (Dalli & Urban, 2010). Early childhood teachers negotiate tensions between subjectivities as respected qualified professionals, meeting accountability requirements, skilled at relationships, and as critical advocates (Adams, 2010; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Sachs, 2001). Discourses that position early childhood teachers as instinctive maternal carers conflict with discourses that position them as professionals. The historical mothering discourse reflects maternalistic perceptions of women (Ailwood, 2008; Bown, Sumsion, & Press, 2011) that associate childcare skills with women's biological and social mothering roles

(Duncan, 1996; Moss, 2006). In contrast, the traditional functionalist discourse positions professionals as highly qualified, well paid, having high status, and maintaining professional standards (Kinos, 2010). The early childhood sector has claimed professionalism through qualifications and professional standards (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; McGillivray, 2008; Oberhuemer, 2012).

Neo-liberal values influence early childhood teachers (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Duncan, 2008a; Osgood, 2008) through accountability requirements of regulations, licensing of early childhood services, qualification and registration of teachers and professional documentation. Neo-liberal managerial professionalism values "choice, efficiency, quality, accountability, and a free market approach" (Sullivan, 1998, cited in Aitken & Kennedy, 2007, p. 176). Osgood (2008) claims that early childhood teachers in the United Kingdom experience de-professionalising through "an intensification of workload with an emphasis on technical competence and performativity"(p. 272). Duncan's (2008b) kindergarten teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand critically reflected on their struggles with conflicting positions in neo-liberal government discourses emphasising competitiveness and efficiency and traditional education discourses that value community and relationships, during a time of education reform.

Relational professionalism shares historical mothering values of love and caring, and is based on a professional ethic of caring (Goldstein, 2002; Noddings, 2003, 2011). Dalli (2006) suggests that caring relationships should be seen as a central pedagogical strategy and means of empowerment for the early childhood profession. However, managerial professionalism's demand for demonstrated technical competence can devalue practitioners' relational and emotional work (Osgood, 2008). Osgood's (2010, 2012) view of early childhood teachers as critically reflective emotional professionals provides possibilities for relational professionalism to be asserted through critical or democratic professionalism.

Critical or democratic early childhood professionalism

Critical or democratic professionalism views early childhood professionals as collaborative activists and advocates, who are critical of social, political and economic structures (Moss & Petrie, 2002; Sachs, 2001; Sumsion, 2005; Woodrow, 2008). Moss (2007) explores the possibilities for early childhood settings becoming places of democratic political practice, where children, practitioners, and other adult citizens would engage in critical decision-making, evaluation and contesting dominant discourses. The *Code of Ethics for Registered Teachers* (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2004) reflects critical professionalism values through four fundamental principles of autonomy (rights), justice, responsible care and truth (honesty). Critical professionalism can be "a vehicle for social transformation and hope grounded in concrete practice" (Dalli & Urban, 2010, p. 150).

In Australia, Sachs (2001) describes democratic professionalism as emphasising activism which entails "collaborative, cooperative action between teachers and other educational stakeholders" (p. 153). She associates democratic professionalism with activist teacher identities based in values of equity and social justice and concerned with transformation. "Critical self-narratives about professional identity" (p. 158) provide means for teachers to become aware of how their subjectivities are shaped within discourses. Woodrow (2007, 2008) calls for early childhood critical professionalism in the face of increased regulation and surveillance, and the rise of corporate early childhood provision in Australia. She describes the 'Robust Hope' movement of researchers wishing to provoke public debate and assert social justice values in education in Australia. Woodrow (2007) suggests that activist researchers should investigate issues of professional identity

and seek to reframe terms that limit possible ways of being for early childhood practitioners. For example, 'childcare' implies 'child storage'; in contrast, 'early learning' is associated with education and qualified teachers.

To become critically activist professionals, early childhood teachers need to be critically aware of how networks of power relations operate throughout the professional system. Critical reflection is linked with awareness of power relations and standing up for values and beliefs through assertiveness and advocacy (MacNaughton, 2005; Osgood, 2006; Sachs, 2001). Smyth (1992) calls for reflection that enables teachers "to uncover the nature of the forces that inhibit and constrain them and work at changing those conditions" (p. 295). Kindergarten teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand showed awareness of how they were positioned within managerial discourses and their options for exerting professional agency (Duncan, 2008b). Reporting research in the United States, Alsup (2006) explains how five of six secondary school teacher participants managed dissonance between their subjectivities and professional expectations through critical reflection. Alsup claims such dissonance informed by awareness of discourses could stimulate "critical engagement with [student teachers'] developing professional selves" (p. 128).

Professionalism has been described as situated within in a complex ecology of relationships (Dalli & Urban, 2010; Miller, Dalli, & Urban, 2012). Drawing on Uri Bronfenbrenner's theories, an ecological view challenges perceptions of professionalism as situated only within individuals. Instead, professionalism is:

> something whose meaning appears to be embedded in local contexts, visible in relational interactions, ethical and political in nature, and involving multiple layers of knowledge, judgement, and influences from the broader societal context. (Dalli, Miller, & Urban, 2012)

According to an ecological framing, early childhood professionalism exists at every level of the professional system; for example, at the microsystem level of interactions between practitioners and others in their immediate professional settings; in mesosystem connections such as community professional networks and inter-professional work, and at the exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem levels of wider local authority, government regulation and socio-historical influences (Dalli et al., 2012).

A critical ecology of professionalism requires teachers' critical reflection and collective activism within an ecological framework. The early childhood profession is faced by a challenge to move from questioning individual teachers' practice in a top-down imposition of professional standards and practice, to practitioners critically questioning practices at every level of the ecological system of early childhood professionalism (Urban, 2010).

An alternative framing for discourses of early childhood professionalism is provided by Duhn (2011), who draws on the theories of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). She describes professionalism discourses as assemblages of ideas, practices and theories. Duhn sees possibilities for critical analysis in exploring possibilities of 'lines of flight', or ways to do things differently, so that new understandings can be developed. Several of the significant reforms of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand can be described as lines of flight to new ways of becoming.

Early childhood teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand

In Aotearoa New Zealand, professionalisation of the early childhood workforce teachers began in the 1980s, when education reforms led to all early childhood education and care services coming under the education umbrella, and a common teaching qualification established for all services (Dalli, 2010). These steps effectively collapsed the division between education and care which has characterised early years' provision in many countries (Dalli, 2010). A strategic plan for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2002) further progressed professionalisation processes by explicitly linking quality with qualified teachers. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the same professional standards govern teacher education and teacher registration in early childhood, primary and secondary school sectors. A strategic plan for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2002) aimed at a 100% qualified workforce in early childhood centres by 2012. In 2012, 71% of early childhood practitioners across all service types were qualified (Education Counts, 2013).

In the context of fiscal constraints in a global recession, the government changed its focus in 2009 to participation, particularly for Māori and Pasifika children. In December 2009, 94.2% of all children starting school had attended an early childhood service. The participation rate for Māori children was 89.8% and for Pasifika, 85.3% (Education Counts, 2013). Government funding was changed to encourage a target level of 80% qualified and registered teachers in early childhood centres, rather than 100%. The legislated level remains at 50%, despite research clearly showing advantages to children's learning of qualified teachers (Meade, Robinson, Smorti, Stuart, & Williamson, 2012; Sylva, 2009). This change in education policy indicates conflicting perceptions of early childhood professionalism between the government and the early years' workforce.

Dalli (2010) calls for early childhood professionals to agitate for change at the exosystem and macrosystem level, beyond their immediate professional settings in a critical ecology of early childhood professionalism in Aotearoa New Zealand. She is concerned about changes in government policy focus and funding away from professionalisation, reductions in government-funded professional development and cancellation of the Centres of Innovation collaborative action research projects between teacher-researchers and academic researchers (Dalli, 2010). Dalli contrasts the activism, advocacy and collectivism that influenced significant early childhood reforms in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s with an 'unusual silence' and 'minimal public response' to what she describes as the "new policy vulnerability" (p. 67) of the early childhood sector.

Theoretical framework

The research is based in a postmodern worldview that understands knowledge as socially-constructed, context-specific and value-laden (Moss & Petrie, 2002). Sachs (2001) echoes this worldview when she refers to identity as "negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous" (p. 154). This understanding contrasts with an essentialist 'true self' understanding of identity that reflects modernist thought. Modernist research of teacher identities might aim to define who participants 'really' were as teachers. Within a postmodern paradigm, this research explores the participants' multiple, complex and dynamic subjectivities. Subjectivities are understood as "the ways we come to define ourselves" (Ryan, Ochsner, & Genishi, 2001, p. 51). Moss (2007) identifies "the paradigmatic divide" (p. 16) between modernist and postmodern paradigms as a troubling issue facing early childhood. He sees the lack of communication between those situating themselves within each paradigm as resulting in dominant neo-liberal values based in modernist thought going unchallenged.

Michel Foucault's theoretical ideas about knowledge, language, power and discourses underpin the research (for example, Foucault, 1980a; MacNaughton, 2005). Foucault theorises that subjectivities are shaped by power relations within discourses. Dominant discourses are sets of values, beliefs and knowledge that shape individuals' subjectivities by determining what is 'known' and 'true', and what are regarded as 'normal' ways to think, speak and act in particular social groups (Gee, 1990; Moss & Petrie, 2002). Power does not only act in a top-down way, but circulates within social settings through discursive practices, which are ways that individuals interact within constraints and possibilities of discourses. Individuals positioned within discourses may have power exerted on them, or govern themselves, or they may actively seek power associated with efficacy, status and pleasure (Foucault, 1980a, 1980b): "[Power] doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but … it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (Foucault, 1980a, p. 119).

Foucault's theories regarding discourses, truth, power and subjectivities provide helpful tools to consider early childhood professionalism. The various ways early childhood professionalism is understood reflects different sets of values and beliefs, and 'normal' ways of thinking and behaving that can be described as discourses. Power relations can be observed in operation through discursive practices that position teachers and provide them with opportunities to exert agency. For example, a discourse of maternalism has historically positioned early childhood practitioners as instinctive nurturers. Values and truths of this discourse include the mother-child dyad, attachment theories, and women as early childhood teachers. Discursive practices that position early childhood teachers within a maternalist discourse include historical narratives and depictions in media. Teachers may exert agency within maternalist discourses through pride in 'mothering' abilities and through associating relational skills with being female.

Methodology
Background to the research
As a teacher educator and Masters thesis student, I became interested in how newly-qualified teachers' subjectivities were shaped. Using poststructural qualitative collective case study methodology, I facilitated five participants' engagement in self-study by asking them to consider the question: 'Who am I as a teacher?' Participants' reflections were explored through focus group discussions, individual interviews, a selection of assessed reflective journal entries from their initial teacher education (ITE) course, and reflective writing about these reflective journal entries.

I approached potential participants from a class who had recently graduated with a field-based three-year Diploma qualification. Purposeful selection aimed to recruit a group of teachers with varying professional and personal backgrounds. However, there was little ethnic and gender diversity within the class from which they were selected. Four participants identified as Pākehā (New Zealand European ethnicity), and one as a European immigrant. All were female. As field-based student teachers, they had worked or volunteered at least 15 hours each week in early childhood centres. At the time of the research, all were employed in education and care (childcare) centres as provisionally-registered teachers, undergoing a two-year supervised registration process (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2011).

In this exploration of how newly-qualified early childhood teachers critically reflect within dominant discourses of early childhood teaching, two participants' data are presented. All participants' data contain examples of critical reflection; however, Sally's and Jessie's (pseudonyms)

critical reflection demonstrate more awareness of power relations at various levels of the professional ecosystem than the other participants.

My teacher educator-researcher role
In keeping with my poststructural paradigm and the perception of early childhood professionalism as an ecological system, I was aware that "we as researchers are *in* the picture we are painting" (emphasis in original) (Urban & Dalli, 2012, p. 172). I had been a teacher educator of the participants and had established relationships of warmth and trust, but I was aware of my previous power over these teachers. I worked to minimise power imbalances through ethical safeguards, such as: inviting participants after they had graduated; gathering data in neutral settings; observing anonymity and confidentiality as researcher (recognising limitations to these in focus group discussions), and using pseudonyms; and giving participants member checking opportunities and power to approve quotes, or not. Both my academic institution and my employing organisation gave ethical approval before research commenced.

Methods
The participants reflected on the focus question 'Who am I as a teacher?' through four phases of data generation. Data consisted of transcribed audio recordings and reflective writing. Focus group discussions gave the participants opportunities to consider their understandings through interactions with others. They were able to reflect on their own identities and histories in depth during individual interviews, and through reflective writing. An initial focus group discussion introduced the research and the participants discussed how they understood their identities. During the weeks that followed, they chose three assessed reflective journal entries from their ITE course work. They used these as a basis to write answers to reflective questions about each journal entry, and then wrote further about how they understood themselves as teachers. The reflective journal entries and the reflective writing about them were analysed as data. Semi-structured individual interviews then drew on preliminary thematic analysis of the first two phases. During the final focus group discussion, participants further explored their subjectivities informed by their research experience. At each focus group discussion, one participant was absent; an individual interview addressed the same topics in each case. Jessie was unavailable for the final focus group discussion, so engaged with me in a final interview.

Preliminary data analysis involved assigning codes to segments of data, and then aggregating codes into themes. The codes consisted of phrases, sentences or paragraphs that seemed to refer to the same topic. The codes aggregated into two sets of themes: one described different ways participants understood the concept of identity, and the other addressed different ways of understanding professionalism. This process gave me some insight into commonalities and differences among the participants' data and helped me become familiar with the data in preparation for individual interviews and subsequent data analysis. Subsequent data analysis drew on Foucault's theories to explore ways participants' subjectivities were shaped by the 'truths' of dominant discourses of early childhood teaching (Foucault, 1980a). I asked questions of the data such as: What is regarded as normal, known and true by these teachers? How are participants positioned, and how do they exert agency? How do these teachers understand themselves as teachers? The answers to these questions led to three dominant discourses becoming evident within the data: the authority discourse, the relational professionalism discourse, and the identity work discourse.

Findings

The findings of this research were that the participants negotiated their subjectivities within three dominant discourses. It was also evident in participants' data that they engaged in critical reflection, when they showed awareness of how they were positioned within power relations and of the opportunities available to them to exert agency. Sally and Jessie showed awareness of how power relations operated at various levels of the professional ecosystem. Examples of Sally's and Jessie's data are explored to see how they critically reflect within constraints and possibilities offered by the three dominant discourses, and whether they engage in a critical ecology.

Three dominant discourses of early childhood teaching

Three dominant discourses of early childhood teaching were evident within participants' data: the authority discourse, the relational professionalism discourse and the identity work discourse. The authority discourse positioned participants as claimed by or claiming authority as early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Teachers were positioned as qualified, knowledgeable and skilled, within hierarchical professional relationships. Sally and Jessie were both claimed by authority as they needed to re-enter ITE to become qualified. Both claimed credibility and pride in becoming qualified teachers. The relational professionalism discourse positioned participants as committed to and skilled in maintaining warm, trusting and positive professional relationships. For example, Jessie used her assessed reflective journal entries as means to prove that she held relational skills of a good teacher. The identity work discourse positioned participants as responsible for shaping their own professional identities by making changes through identity work such as reflective practice or by holding on to values and beliefs. Identity work is understood to be the work individuals do in "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165) the ways they understand themselves and the way they portray themselves to others. For example, Jessie and Sally both described using reflective practice to do identity work by shaping their teaching practice.

Critical reflection and critical ecology

Early childhood professionals engaging in a critical ecology are aware of professionalism as situated in every level of an ecological professional system, and are "reflective, self-critical and perpetually open to responsive growth in their local context" (Dalli, 2007, cited in Dalli, 2010, p. 62). Jessie's and Sally's critical reflections showed that they understood themselves as situated within a professional ecological framework within circulating power relations. For example, Jessie and Sally were both aware of how power associated with NZQA in the professional ecosystem classified them as unqualified, and excluded from the status of 'teacher'. They were also critically aware of how regaining the status of teacher gave them power of authority and credibility: "Now that I have my Diploma and I am in a head teacher position I can hold my head high. I hope that I radiate my new confidence; I know that I deserve it" (Sally, reflective writing task).

Jessie's critical reflections

Jessie immigrated into Aotearoa New Zealand with an early childhood teaching qualification and over 20 years of experience in her European home country. She was positioned as unqualified within the authority discourse when the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) did not recognise her overseas teaching qualification and experience: "NZQA said 'No, no, no, no', and then finally, 'No, it's too long ago, you have to study again'" (first focus group). To become a teacher again, she had to re-enter ITE.

Jessie's critical reflections are evident when she shows that she is aware that her subjectivities are negotiated in social interactions within power relations. She is critically aware of the professional system at the exosystem level and how she is subject to regulatory power. She feels as if she had lost her 'whole' identity when she could not claim subjectivity as a teacher:

> [I was] a teacher in training, who just started the course, and just new in the centre. [I was] a teacher with a great and long and interesting experience from overseas, who felt so lost in her new country. [I was] a teacher who lost her identity. I was not the teacher who I was for 23 years. (reflective writing about assessed reflective journal entry)

Jessie's critical reflections within the authority discourse show she is aware of power she can claim through responsibility as a qualified teacher: "Oh my God, I'm qualified but now I have to take more responsib[ility]! Oh, this is me, the only one [qualified teacher] here, you know?" (first focus group).

The identity work discourse positions Jessie as responsible for shaping her own professional identities. Jessie critically reflects on her motivation to do identity work to feel that she belongs in early childhood education contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand. Jessie felt challenged by having English as an additional language, and having different 'knowledges':

> I found myself really fragile in the beginning [when I] couldn't say what I wanted to tell …, and because all the knowledge I gained there [in my home country] was different here [in Aotearoa New Zealand]. (final interview)

Jessie compares early childhood teaching macrosystems in her home country and in Aotearoa New Zealand: "But as a teacher in [home country] I was focussed on the development of stages, and now I focus [on] how do they play together, how do they communicate, how do they interact?" (interview).

Jessie purposefully uses reflective practice to shape her professional subjectivities. She uses technical reflection in her assessed reflective writing examples from her ITE course to show her relational professionalism. For example, she wrote about helping an unsettled child start to feel a sense of belonging. Jessie describes reflective identity work within her early childhood centre microsystem:

> And it will help another one [teacher] to think 'Oh yes, what you said was really true'. And so another teacher can come up with a good highlight and the things where you can work on or want to know or whatever, or I can tell you what I found from you. (final interview)

Jessie's critical reflections show that she was aware of the professional ecological system, and how her subjectivities are negotiated within circulating power relations. The dominant authority, relational professionalism and identity work discourses limit the possible ways she can understand herself as an early childhood teacher. Jessie uses her resources to engage in a critical ecology within these discursive limits. She re-entered ITE, and worked to belong within the professional ecological system by engaging in identity work to fit in.

Sally's reflections about her teacher subjectivities

Sally's critical reflections show she is aware of being situated in ecological systems of early childhood education and in society. Like Jessie, Sally is aware that her subjectivities are negotiated within power relations. She was positioned as unqualified within the authority discourse; this discussion has been published elsewhere (Warren, 2013). After over 20 years of experience as an early childhood practitioner, Sally's New Zealand teaching qualification became insufficient when NZQA requirements changed. She re-entered ITE because she felt that her employment as an unqualified practitioner was threatened by the strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2002) target (since abandoned) of 100% qualified teachers in centres by 2012.

Within the identity work discourse, Sally's critical reflections show that she engages in a critical ecology at a local microsystem level. Sally uses different identities to actively position herself as teacher or parent-like in her professional microsystem: "sometimes I say to parents, ok, this is my parent hat I've got on. And often I've got my teacher hat on" (interview). Sally embraces her position in the identity work discourse as responsible for and capable of growth and change as a teacher. For example, when she was a student teacher, she resisted defining her teaching philosophy because she understood that she was negotiating her subjectivities:

> I was in such a meaningful, powerful and unpredictable stage of my life. I was halfway through my teacher training and learning so much about myself and my teaching. I was about to metamorphose. (reflective writing about assessed reflective journal entry)

Sally uses reflective skills and insight to actively shape her teaching practices within her early childhood centre microsystem. She views reflection as a tool she can use to actively negotiate her subjectivities:

> Being taught to be reflective is what's influencing me, I think. 'Cause, like [another participant], I'm seeing stuff that, not necessarily I don't like, but I don't want to do that. So sort of reflecting on how I would do it. Self-checking in a wee way I suppose. (First focus group)

Sally gains power and pleasure within the identity work discourse:
> I am also becoming a teacher who can stand back and watch, listen, learn and have input without taking over the event. I have not always taught this way, and I like what I have become. (self-study written tasks)

Sally critically reflects on how role modelling influenced her identity work when she considers the circulating power or influence between her role model and her subjectivities. She describes her role model as her aspiration: "what I see as a teacher" (first focus group), and considers emulating her role model: "I think for a long time I thought, 'How would she deal with that?'" (interview). Sally's agency is evident in her decision to avoid trying to model herself on someone else: "It would be really hard to put on a façade all the time" (individual interview).

Sally shows that she is aware of critical professionalism at the microsystem level when she reflects on her advocacy for a child by challenging an adult who had criticised a family's beliefs: "I found myself in a situation where I was expressing my view … that 'It is not our job (as adults) to agree or understand but to respect" (reflective writing about 'Who am I as a teacher?').

The examples of Sally's critical reflections show her awareness of being situated in a professional ecological system. She describes being subject to power and being able to exert power through agency within her microsystem, an early childhood centre where she had been a practitioner for many years. Sally demonstrates agency in doing identity work to change her own identities, and about advocating for others within her immediate professional setting.

Discussion: Critical reflection, critical ecology and dominant discourses

At the time of the research, Jessie and Sally had recently become qualified teachers in contexts of early childhood professionalisation and regulation, within networks of power relations. They are subject to powerful influences to conform to NZQA and ITE requirements, as well as professional standards, as they work through a two-year teacher registration process. Dominant discourses of authority, relational professionalism and identity work limit the ways they can be as teachers. Their critical reflections show that within the authority discourse they feel subjected to power from the exosystem of NZQA, who could grant or withhold status as qualified teachers. Sally and Jessie exert power through their self-efficacy within the identity work discourse, and within their own microsystems, as they make decisions about how they will be as teachers. In similar ways, Duncan's (2008b) kindergarten teacher participants and Alsup's (2006) student teacher participants were critically aware of how they were positioned within power relations, and the ways they negotiated their subjectivities within these.

Dalli (2010) calls for the re-emergence of a critical ecology of the early childhood profession in Aotearoa New Zealand to challenge the recent policy changes that appear to be halting the professionalisation process that has been a feature of early childhood teaching since the 1980s. Osgood (2008, 2010) and Woodrow (2008) call on early childhood professionals to determine their own perceptions of professionalism and resist imposed managerial professionalism that positions them as accountable technicians. Dalli and Urban (2010) draw on the theories of Paulo Freire to urge early childhood practitioners to "name their world and thus claim it" (p. 152). However, Jessie and Sally critically reflect on who they were as teachers within constraints and possibilities offered by three dominant discourses.

The data from Jessie, Sally and the other three newly qualified participants in the research show that their subjectivities are shaped by the authority discourse, the relational professionalism discourse and the identity work discourse. Critical professionalism and advocacy were acknowledged in discussion as part of who they are as teachers, but not as dominant as other aspects of being teachers. The focus question of this research was "Who am I as a teacher?" In simple terms, participants' answers are: 'I am qualified, skilled and knowledgeable, relationally professional and I take responsibility for how I am as a teacher'.

As Dalli states, the early childhood profession in Aotearoa New Zealand has achieved much in the past through critical ecology. She points out that the activism was orchestrated largely by unionists and academics, whose roles and relationships are situated differently in the professional ecological system than early childhood teachers, especially newly qualified teachers. From my experience as a teacher educator, I know that student teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand are encouraged to be critically aware of historical, social and political issues, including issues of biculturalism and multiculturalism. I assert that dominant discourses of early childhood teaching shape teachers as powerful in shaping their own identities within their immediate professional microsystems. However, they are subject to powerful forces from exosystem and macrosystem levels of the

professional system, particularly during ITE and as newly qualified teachers. Jessie, Sally and the other research participants seem to have limited self-efficacy to engage in critical collective activism regarding wider societal and political issues that influence professional early childhood teaching practice.

Conclusion

The question posed by this article is 'How do newly-qualified early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand critically reflect within constraints and possibilities of dominant discourses of early childhood teaching' My answer to the question is that present dominant discourses and networks of power relations constrain possibilities for critical reflection by Sally and Jessie. They understand how early childhood professionalism could be viewed as an ecological system and the networks of power within the system. They are also critically aware of how they are subject to power and how they can exert agency. Their engagement in a critical ecology is constrained by dominant discourses and by power relations.

Professionalisation in Aotearoa New Zealand subjects early childhood teachers to powerful regulatory forces through professional standards and accountability, at the same time as granting status and credibility as professionals providing quality education. Critical professionalism and a critical ecology depend on teachers' self-efficacy to assert social justice values and beliefs beyond their immediate professional settings. Such efficacy may be limited for early childhood teachers positioned in discourses of authority, relational professionalism and identity work, especially for newly qualified teachers. Teacher educators, researchers and unionists work to inform teachers, to present alternative conceptualisations of early childhood professionalism, and to provide them with a collective voice. The aim of such work is to provide teachers with self-efficacy to focus outwards towards the mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem levels of the early childhood professional ecological system in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Acknowledgements

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