International Journal of Innovation and Research in Educational Sciences
Volume 2, Issue 3, ISSN (Online): 2349–5219

Are We All Travelling Similar Paths to Early Childhood Professionalisation? The Case of Bhutan

Prof. Margaret Sims, Ms Karma Pedey

***Abstract* – There have been repeated calls for early childhood, within Australia and internationally, to become professionalised. In Australia this often advocated in order to address disparities of status, pay, and conditions between early childhood and primary/secondary teachers. However, there are risks to the pursuit of professionalism through adherence to the education discourse. In particular, the education discourse reifies teaching and learning and problematises relationship and caring work. Much of the literature examining the professionalisation of early childhood comes from western nations, and there is little examination of the paths being travelled by early childhood in other nations. In this study a country with a very different national habitas to that of Australia, Bhutan, was chosen to explore the path taken to professionalisation in early childhood, operating on the assumption that the extreme case may offer different ways of perceiving and understanding the path to early childhood professionalisation.**

***Keywords* – Professionalisation, Care Education Dichotomy, Bhutan, Case Study.**

I. INTRODUCTION

A separation between services delivering education and those delivering care is a product of western history. In countries such as Australia, early childhood services are generally perceived as less important than schools, partly because schools are considered to educate children whereas early childhood services' main function is perceived as care. The current differences in pay, status and working conditions between early childhood and primary teachers in Australia, for example, reflect an ongoing perception of early childhood as 'inferior' [1]. There have been repeated calls for early childhood, within Australia and internationally, to become professionalised in order to address disparities of status, pay, and conditions between early childhood and primary/secondary teachers [2-6] however, this path to professionalisation is faced with the challenge of addressing perceived differences between care and education.

Not only is there a perception of a care/education split between early childhood and primary schooling in Australia, there is also an education/care dichotomy within early childhood itself [1]. Early childhood education services evolved to prepare generally middle-class children for schooling [7]. In countries such as Australia these educational programmes were sessional and based on the assumption that mothers were not working and could therefore be available not only to deliver and collect their children from sessions that lasted 2-3 hours, but could also be available to help out [8, 9]. Early childhood teachers in these settings were usually themselves from a middle class background. Given early childhood training was not available in Australia until the early 20th century, many of these teachers who could afford to do so, travelled and trained overseas [10, 11]. Their educational philosophy was thus influenced by luminaries such as Maria Montessori [12] and Friedrich Froebel [13]. These philosophies shared a common emphasis on children's capacity to learn despite their recommendations of different approaches needed to facilitate that learning.

In contrast, care services in Australia, and elsewhere in the western world, evolved not from a concern about children's learning as such, but from a preoccupation with children as a future menace to society if they were not properly trained [7]. Maybanke Anderson, a key figure in the development of the NSW Kindergarten Association, wrote in 1907:

The children of the drunken and the dissolute, of the deserted wife, who earns a bare living while they play in the street; the children of the incapable, and of those who by birth or training are useless and utterly irresponsible, the coming citizens – they gather in the gutters of the narrow byways, and even in their chatter and their play, one who knows how to listen may hear a menace for the future [14].

Care services thus were associated with welfare for the poor; and accompanying this was a mission to 'train' lower class mothers in 'proper' child rearing strategies. Maybanke Anderson in 1913 wrote:

There is widespread superstition that to take care of a child is to undermine the inborn love of the mother, and to hinder or destroy her maternal responsibility. No pagan superstition has less foundation. The poor uneducated mother who has been, before her marriage, and sometimes even up until the birth of her child, a factory girl or shop hand, has often substantial reason for looking on her baby as a burden, to be got rid of as soon as he can run about. Of course she loves her offspring, and the more she loves it, the more she feels her ignorance, and the heavier grows her burden. To take care of her child, not only helps her materially, but also teachers her by example to love it wisely and to treat it better. No working mother ever cared less for her little ones because of the Free Kindergarten. On the contrary, many an ignorant or careless one has there learned her first lesson in homely wisdom [14].

In Australia, as in a number of other western countries such as the UK and New Zealand, early childhood is progressing towards professionalisation by following a path laid down by the education discourse. This path is based on the assumption that early childhood might be recognised as a profession if it takes on the characteristics of education. Early Childhood professionals would become early childhood teachers/educators and they would receive similar respect, conditions and pay to those currently experienced by primary and secondary teachers.

There are risks to that choice [15]. In particular, the education discourse reifies teaching and learning and problematises relationship and caring work. Taggart [16] calls this focus on the education discourse performative professionalism where:

... care is seen as part of a taken-for-granted' assemblage of lower skills which acts as a platform upon which the higher skills of professionalisation can be built. The clear message is that caring is not part of professionalism itself... (p87)

Early childhood programmes offered to children over the age of 3 are more likely to be perceived as educational and in recent times are considered important in preparing children for school. The recent Productivity Commission [17] report in Australia clearly states that preschool (programmes for children over 3 years of age) is generally beneficial but that children under 3 years of age are better off in their homes with their mothers; if they are in care, they do not need a trained teacher but rather some-one with a basic vocational qualification.

This division within early childhood in Australia is reflected in other western nations. For example in the UK the exclusion of care from the official early childhood discourse has led early childhood professionals to change what they do "… in ways which make it [their work] less meaningful for them" [18] resulting in "... dissatisfaction and disaffection..." (p796). In Sweden the combining of university-level early childhood pedagogue courses with those for school teaching resulted in more graduates choosing to work in schools than in early childhood [6], reflecting the higher value placed on education.

Certainly the challenge facing early childhood professionals across numerous countries is to resolve the dilemma identified by Taggart [16]:

...early years practitioners are faced with a paradox. On the one hand, heart, soul and passion are necessary for work with young children. On the other, these same qualities prevent practitioners from being considered as professional: cheerfulness and amateurish enthusiasm are seen to be all that is necessary.

However, much of the literature examining the professionalisation of early childhood comes from western nations, and there is little examination of the paths being travelled by early childhood in other nations. That is unfortunate given that we can learn much from understanding different perceptions. It is possible that learning from the experiences of other countries [as 16 says "seeking solidarity internationally"] can help us in Australia (and elsewhere in the western world) understand a little better how early childhood might progress towards professionalisation without losing essential elements such as care. In this context, the extreme case, a country with a very different national habitas to that of Australia, was chosen to explore the path taken to professionalisation in early childhood, operating on the assumption that the extreme case may offer different ways of perceiving and understanding. In this process we continue to reflect on the differences and similarities both Bhutanese and Australian early childhood professionals' perspectives.

II. The Context Of The Research

Bhutan is a landlocked country at the eastern end of the Himalayas. It became a constitutional monarchy in 2008 when its first general election was held. The state religion is Vajrayana Buddhism which is followed by around 70% of the population. A new constitution was introduced in 2005 and this emphasises the importance of spirituality "… which promotes the principles and values of peace, non-violence, compassion and tolerance" [19]. It is in this context that Gross National Happiness is used as a measure of the country's wellbeing [20]. Television and the internet were only permitted into Bhutan in 1999 (Bhutan Media Foundation - http://www.bmf.bt/media-in-bhutan/) and there are concerns that this has brought western values into Bhutan, impacting on young people and challenging Bhutanese values and the Bhutanese way of life (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3812275.stm).

Early childhood services began in Bhutan in 2004 and a national early childhood policy is now in draft form. Whilst there is still a strong perception that children under 6 are better off in their homes, an increase in nuclear family forms in comparison to extended family forms, particularly in metropolitan areas, has created a demand for child care services [21]. The Ministry of Education have established an overarching early childhood care and development (ECCD) approach which aims to ensure that early childhood services offer:

... the best start in life for all children from birth to age eight by enhancing access to quality early childhood care and education to ensure that they are healthy, happy and ready to learn [22].

Whilst there is a drive to increase the number of child care centres, there are significant concerns that those leading the development are external experts, and that there is as yet little local early childhood expertise [21]. However, the uniqueness of the concept of Gross National Happiness, and the strongly expressed desire to maintain and support Bhutanese culture, led us to believe that the Bhutanese context would provide us with an insight into the thinking underpinning the evolution of early childhood services in Bhutan that could inform the professionalisation of early childhood debate in Australia (and elsewhere in the western world). Thus we ask: what do Bhutanese workers in early childhood think about the professionalisation of early childhood in their country?

III. Methodology

The ontology underpinning this research is that of interpretivism, defined as a social construction of truth [23-25]. There is not one universal truth but rather a range of understandings which people co-construct and share with others through language. This sharing creates a joint understanding which does not necessarily represent one reality, but rather a joint construction. This leads to the epistemology of this study that of social constructivism which posits that truth is constructed by humans acting in a social world, interpreting their experiences [26, 27]. In

the light of this positioning, our study asks those working in early childhood services in Bhutan their ideas about professionalisation of early childhood. In doing this they will draw on their own experiences and their own understandings and share these ideas with us through language. The study is presented as a case study with the case being early childhood education in Bhutan.

1) Participants

In Bhutan at present there are a total of 211 early childhood centres out of which 159 are government owned. Government owned services are mostly spread across the rural areas. There are 52 are private-run centres which are concentrated in urban areas.

An invitation to participate in this study was sent to five main categories of respondents who had access to email/internet (this is a limitation of the study given it was unfunded and we did not have the resources to visit those who did not have internet access):

1. Four Key ECCD officials of the Special Education Needs and ECCD Division in the Ministry of Education who are the government's ECCD regulatory arm;
2. 10 proprietors of private ECCD centres;
3. 40 ECCD facilitators, mostly from private ECCD centres;
4. 2 Key ECCD officials of Save the Children Office (Bhutan) who are involved in building the capacity of ECCD facilitators and who facilitate the development of ECCD play and learning materials and fund studies related to ECCD;
5. 10 Independent researchers who had carried out funded studies related to ECCD.

The invitation was sent to private ECCD centres in Thimphu, Paro, Punakha, W.Phodrang, Gelephu and Phuntsholing. A follow up phone call showed that most from Paro and Thimphu to whom the invitation was sent had responded while those from other towns did not despite several requests. Some said they had not responded because they were uncertain how to answer an online survey while some said that their internet connectivity was too poor to respond to an online survey.

Unfortunately, all those invited to participate came from urban areas as the government centres located in rural areas did not have an internet connection, and we were unable to access these services in another way.

2) Method

An online survey developed as part of a larger study examining professionalisation in a number of different countries [see 1, for the results of the pilot Australian data and a description of the questionnaire] was piloted to ensure that questions were appropriately contextualised. A brief invitation to participate accompanied by a brief explanation as to the aims of the study was circulated via email. This provided a link which led to a full information letter and the online questionnaire. The questionnaire was in English as it was judged the participants had sufficient confidence in English to manage this (note that higher education in Bhutan is delivered in English).

Ethics approval for the parent study, and for the Bhutanese sub-study, was granted by the Ethics Committee of the home university. The relevant Heads of Departments within the Ministry of Education in Bhutan were also consulted and they advised that Departmental ethical clearance was not required.

3) Analysis

The questionnaire package used (Qualtrics) presents tables of results and summary statistics (minimum, maximum, mean, variance and standard deviation). Open ended questions produce a written transcript which was analysed using the process of constant comparison as initially articulated by Glaser [28]. Themes were identified in the data and quotes assigned to themes to illustrate the meaning of the theme and the boundaries of that theme.

IV. RESULTS

Thirty six people answered the online questionnaire, around half were teachers working in early childhood services (child care or preschools) with children. Not all of the participants answered each question so the number who answered each question is provided.

The majority of participants (16/28) had worked in early childhood for less than 2 years; 32% had worked between 2 and 5 years; 11% between 5 and 10 years, and none 10 years or longer. Only one participant had a 3 year university degree in early childhood education. Three had qualified teacher status and 15/28 identified their training as that of Early Childhood Care and Education Facilitator. One was a qualified nurse, two had other bachelor degrees, one had a masters (but did not indicate in which area), one had completed higher secondary school and one had a qualification in management. Most of the participants (21/28) were female and nearly a third (9/28) were under 25. Just under half (12/28) were between 25 and 34, one was between 35 and 44 and 6 were between 45 and 54. The majority were from metropolitan areas (12/28 from small city, 3 from inner city of a large city and 5 each from small and large towns) and only two were from regional areas and one from a remote area.

We explored why participants' thought early childhood services were needed in order to gain an understanding of the priority they placed on the various justifications for early childhood services. Participants ranked a number of statements in the order they thought most relevant with 1 as the most important and 9 as the least important. The mean value of these rankings was calculated: the closer the mean value is to 1 the more participants agreed the statement was important to them.

There were two other reasons added to the list: each by one person: "Children need to be prepared to be responsible citizens" and "Children have the right to express themselves". Table 2 shows that the statement most participants rated as important was "Children need a range of interactions with adults and peers" followed by "Children need to be well cared for when Their parents work". The statements raked as least important were "Children have the right to participate in group contexts" and "Children need to be prepared for school". These rankings are interesting as they suggest that the Australian idea that a key role of early childhood services is to prepare children for school has not gained a place in the thinking of Bhutanese early childhood professionals.

Table 1: Positions participants hold in early childhood

Employment	Number	Percent of sample
teacher in child care centres, toddler groups	8	29%
teacher in child care centres, with children aged 3-5 years	9	32%
teacher in integrated special education groups	1	4%
teacher in Preschools	3	11%
Playgroups	1	4%
Maternity clinics	1	4%
Academic (university / vocational sector) teaching in early childhood courses	1	4%
Policy maker focusing on early childhood policy development	2	7%
Manager running early childhood programmes but not working directly with children or their families	2	7%
Manager running early childhood programmes with some contact with children and their families	3	11%
A consultant who has done at least one consultancy in early childhood	2	7%
Researcher / research assistant	3	11%

Table 2: Participants' average rating of the relative importance of statements relating to the need for early childhood services

N=26	Min rating	Max rating	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation
Children need to be well cared for when their parents work	1	8	3.38	7.45	2.73
Children need a range of interactions with adults and peers	1	7	3.19	3.12	1.77
Children need a range of experiences	1	9	4.19	4.0	2.0
Children who are disadvantaged need to have learning opportunities outside the home	1	8	4.85	3.74	1.93
Children have the right to participate in group contexts	2	8	5.92	2.71	1.65
Children have the right to learn through play	1	8	4.46	3.7	1.92
Children who have quality early childhood services are better prepared for employment in the future	1	9	5.04	7.64	2.76
Children need to be prepared for school	1	8	5.38	6.33	2.52

Instead there is a strong focus on children's need to interact with a range of different people (adults and peers) and it may be that this arises from traditional Bhutanese

culture where children were raised in villages where all members took communal responsibility for their welfare. The influence of westernisation is, however, seen in the second most important statement: the need for children to be cared for whilst their parents work. This may well reflect the nature of the sample: most of the participants were from towns and the city and it is in these very contexts where people have moved away from their villages, where the extended family is no longer the main family form and people no longer have access to grandparent or relative care for their children. The answer to this question may be very different had we been able to access those in the rural and remote areas. However, we argue it is the people in the metropolitan areas who are driving service development thus their perspectives are likely to be particularly influential in the ongoing evolution of early childhood services.

Participants were asked to rank statements about the benefits of professionalisation of early childhood. They ranked the statements in order allocating the rank of 1 to the benefit they saw as most significant. The closer the average score is to 1 the more important the benefit was ranked by participants.

There is clear evidence in Table 3 that the key benefits participants see in professionalisation are not about their own personal gains (increased pay, improved status) but in increased recognition of the importance of the early childhood years for the nation's future. In Bhutan the results suggest priority is not placed on encouraging more males to enter the profession nor is there much concern over standardising qualifications or controlling who works in early childhood. Of those who indicated they did not think there were any benefits to professionalisation (2 people) both identified that the key reason for this position was that mothers do this work all the time and that the school years are more important than the early childhood years.

Participants were asked to rank a series of statements about the risks of professionalisation, with 1 being the most significant risk. These statements were drawn from the western literature around professionalisation and

participants had the opportunity to add another risk that was not included in the table. Eighteen participants felt that there were risks to professionalisation and proceeded to rank those risks; 6 felt there were no risks so did not undertake the ranking.

Table 4 shows that there was great variation in participants' ratings cross these items. The risks identified as the most important by participants were about imposition of curriculum and increasing demands for documentation. It is interesting that the risk of excluding the care component of early childhood work, which is such a focus in much of the western writing [1, 29, 30, for example, 31] is not identified as a concern in Bhutan at this point.

Participants were asked to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of using the education discourse as the pathway to professionalisation – only 12 participants answered this question. One reflected on the care/education dichotomy:

In the early years of the child's life, I think it's important to focus on the caring and relationship component of the work rather than on teaching and learning component. Once you establish a good relationship between you and the learners then feel it would be easier to introduce the teaching and the learning process (participant 1).

And three articulated the need for a balance between care and education elements:

The bottom line is to ensure that professionalisation is balanced with the care and relationship aspects, grounded in a particular country's context, culture and development principles, such as the GNH in our own context (participant 3).

Table 3: The benefits of professionalisation of early childhood are:

N=25	Min value	Max value	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation
Increased status	1	9	5.60	5.75	2.4
It is important for everyone to understand the importance of early childhood years in shaping a better society	1	4	1.28	0.63	0.79
Increased pay	1	9	5.60	6.08	2.47
Clear and shared understanding of what good quality practice looks like	1	9	3.76	4.52	2.13
An agreed body of knowledge that all practitioners share	1	8	4.04	3.12	1.77
Standardised qualifications so that we know what to expect from all practitioners	1	9	5.40	3.0	1.73
Control over who can work as an early childhood educator	3	9	5.40	3.0	1.73
Increased status will attract more male practitioners	1	9	6.40	5.08	2.25

Table 4: The risks associated with professionalisation of early childhood are:

N=18	Min value	Max value	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation
control[1]	1	10	6.06	13.7	3.7
Imposed curriculum [2]	1	9	4.28	8.09	2.85
documentation[3]	1	9	4.28	6.8	2.61
Differentiation from mothering[4]	1	9	4.59	6.26	2.50
Exclusion of different types of work[5]	2	8	4.39	4.25	2.06
Exclusion of caring[6]	3	9	5.11	4.58	2.14
multicultural[7]		9	5.39	4.13	2.03
safety[8]	1	8	5.22	5.48	2.34
Lack of commitment[9]	1	9	6.11	6.93	2.63

[1] The risk of handing over control of professional decisions to external people who may not be early childhood people (eg in USA insurance companies determine who qualifies for surgery and how long people should stay in hospital, not doctors).

[2] The risk of having curriculum developed and then imposed upon early childhood professionals in a way that constrains their ability to respond flexibly to the unique needs of each child, family and community. This is the idea that a curriculum framework undermines professional ability to make decisions

[3] The risk of having to demonstrate your professionalism through documenting what you do, which potentially takes your time away from spending time with children

[4] The risk that comes with needing to separate what early childhood professionals do from the work that mothers do, which results in the exclusion of Childminders and nannies from the Early Childhood profession

[5] The risk that comes with needing to separate what early childhood professionals do from the work that mothers do, which results in the exclusion of Childminders and nannies from the Early Childhood profession

[6] The risk that comes with needing to separate what early childhood professionals do from the work that mothers do, which results in the exclusion of Childminders and nannies from the Early Childhood profession

[7] The risk that the profession defines what should be done in a way that limits the flexibility needed to work multi-culturally

[8] The risk that the professional need to keep children safe restricts their experiences

[9] The risk that professional demands and input do not match with the low salary of the early childhood workers which may lead to having de-motivated, dispassionate and less caring people working in the centres

Others talked about the intrusion of school-like features into early childhood programmes, a concern also identified in the Australian data [1]:

In the case of Bhutan, parents are very ambitious and thus want to prepare their children for transition to school. This overwhelms the children as they are deprived of so many beautiful experiences and fun of learning through play. For instance, the room for children are designed like a classroom with tables and benches to sit and write and which doesn't allow free play (participant 4)

One participant felt that alignment with education was important to ensure success in education:

It's better to be aligned with education to pursue better foundation for future education (participant 11).

To help us define the kinds of roles that people thought should be in the early childhood profession (and those that should not) we asked participants to identify those they thought should be included (see Table 5). As expected, those who work in child care centres, preschools, kindergartens and other group programmes for children were generally considered to be part of the early childhood profession. Interestingly, so also were Child and Maternal Health Nurses (81%). People working in this role tend to be excluded from the early childhood profession in many contexts (perhaps because they are educated in the health discourse not the education discourse): in the pilot data collection from Australia less than 40% of 107 participants felt Child and Maternal Health Nurses should be part of the early childhood profession (as yet unpublished data).

Table 5: Who should be included in the early childhood profession?

Roles included in EC profession	No.	%
Preschools / pre-primary for children in the year before compulsory schooling	18	69
Playgroups	21	81
Childminders	10	38
Family Day Care Co-ordinator	17	65
Children's Centres / Child and Family Centres – working with children	16	62
Children's Centres / Child and Family Centres – working with parents / parent support / parent education	14	54
First years of school – teaching children 4-8 years of age	15	58
Teachers with Qualified Teacher Status	17	65
Child protection workers focusing on children under the age of 8	13	50
Intensive family support workers – in-home family preservation work aimed at preventing child removal	11	42
Child and Maternal Health nurses	21	81
Academics (university / vocational sector) who are teaching in early childhood courses	13	50
Academics (university / vocational sector) who are researching in early childhood	10	38
Policy makers who are focusing on early childhood policy development	17	65
Managers who are running early childhood programmes but not working directly with children or their families	8	31
Managers who are running early childhood programmes who have some contact with children and their families	12	46
Administrators who are implementing and monitoring the implementation of early childhood initiatives	13	50
Local authority advisors in Early Education and Care	10	38
Those undertaking quality and/or compliance inspections of early childhood services	11	42
Bilingual centres for children under 8	5	19
Mobiles (play busses)	6	23
Early Childhood facilitators	23	88

The low inclusion for those working in Bilingual Centres and Mobiles may reflect the scarcity of these services in Bhutan.

Perceptions of the responsibilities of early childhood professionals varied. One person identified that responsibility for supporting children's social-emotional needs, their health needs, wellbeing or culture were not responsibilities that should be carried by any early childhood professional. Two people felt that ensuring children had adequate nutrition was also not the responsibility of early childhood professionals. The key responsibilities for early childhood educators were thought to be supporting children's language development and providing educational experiences (22 of 25 respondents), supporting children's social-emotional development (21/24), and supporting children's cognitive development, supporting children's culture, provision of art education and supporting children to feel they belonged in the group (20/24). In terms of their responsibilities to children, setting managers/leaders were thought to be responsible for supporting children's families (7/24) and working in partnership with parents (6/24). Few identified roles for nursery nurses, but those who did focused on supporting children's health needs (20/24) and ensuring children had adequate nutrition (16/24).

The most popular choice for a name for early childhood professionals was that of "Early Childhood Facilitators" (10 of 26 participants) and this is the title currently used in Bhutan. Other choices were "Early Childhood Education and Care Educators" (3/26), "Early Years Educators" (3/26), "Early Childhood Teachers" (2/26) and "Early Childhood Educators" (2/26). Only one person chose a title which included "Pedagogue", in this case the variation chosen was "Early Childhood Education and Care Pedagogues".

Participants were asked to reflect on the provision of services for infants and toddlers and how this type of service provision might fit into their idea of an early childhood profession. Ten participants provided their reflections. Some felt that the way early childhood services in Bhutan currently operate, with a strong focus on education rather than care, services for infants and toddlers would be inappropriate:

In Bhutan the focus is more on preparing children on literacy and numeracy and not on care. Thus, to a large extent the holistic development component is missing (Participant 6)

Main issue in Bhutan is that the ECCD facilitators are not professionally trained. The focus is more on educational discourse rather than on the Care focus (Participant 2)

Too much focus on reading and writing in Bhutan and very less on learning through play (Participant 7)

Others felt that parents did not understand the importance of addressing care in order to provide appropriate learning opportunities for children and felt that this was a significant disadvantage (presumably because parental demand was likely to drive services to meet the demand, rather than attempt to change parental perceptions. This is particularly relevant in Bhutan where there is a growth of private centres in urban areas catering for working parents):

Parents think that they have come to centre to learn alphabet and all and they misunderstand what ECCD is (Participant 8)

V. Discussion

What can we in Australia learn from the perspectives of Bhutanese early childhood professionals about the journey towards professionalisation in early childhood? Firstly that cultural differences influence the priority people place on certain values and the dimensions of tension between education and care. There is a common assumption that being that being recognised as a professional will lead to improved pay and conditions [for example in writings such as 30, 32, 33]. However, the Bhutanese respondents identified the most important reason for professionalisation as increased recognition of the importance of the early childhood years because of the impact of the early childhood years on children's outcomes and thus the nation's future. In a cultural context that focuses on the importance of citizenship, and with a national measure of Gross National Happiness, Bhutanese early childhood professionalisation is not about the workers themselves gaining recognition, but about recognition of their contribution towards the nation's future. It will be interesting to track developments over the next few years to explore how this different positioning impacts on the evolution of early childhood services.

Secondly we can see from the data that westernisation has an impact on the way people think about and offer early childhood education services in Bhutan and thus the path travelled towards early childhood professionalisation. It is unfortunate that our sample is mainly from the urban areas [which are more impacted by westernisation - 21] but practical limitations prevented the research team accessing rural and remote participants. Pedey's work certainly suggests that those living in the rural and remote areas are likely to adhere to more traditional values and practices compared to those in metropolitan areas. However, it is our contention that those in the metropolitan areas are the ones most likely to influence the evolution of early childhood services in Bhutan, thus understanding their perspectives is more likely to give an idea of how services and the early childhood profession may evolve. It is interesting that the preservation of children's culture is rated as reasonably important in participants' perceptions of early childhood professionals' roles along with a range of educational foci such as supporting children's language and cognitive development which suggests that that participants value the cultural context in which they are working in much the same way they value the learning opportunities they deliver.

Participants in the main did not position early childhood provision as having a key role in preparing children for school, but they certainly thought that parents and perhaps the wider community were strongly focused on the importance of early education, not only in preparing children for school but in preparing children as future citizens. The consequence of this was they felt pressured into running programmes that took a stronger educational focus than they may have preferred. In their reflections they identified what they saw as parental misunderstanding of the importance of play and the importance of care, and an over-emphasis on literacy. In rating the risks of professionalisation they identified their key concerns were around the imposition of curriculum and increasing requirements for documentation. It appears that the early childhood community in Bhutan is facing a challenge that will require ongoing reflection about what is important in the evolution of early childhood services. A user-driven system appears likely to lead to a strongly educational focus, with the attendant risks associated with this approach. On the other hand, a holistic focus that attempts to incorporate care and education is likely to be resisted by families and may require a commitment not only to public education but also to ensuring that what develops is uniquely Bhutanese and not an import. Achieving this balance may be difficult as western influences continue to percolate into Bhutan through technology and, to a lesser extent, tourism.

Is Bhutan positioned to reflect the care/education dichotomy evident in many western early childhood nations such as Australia? It certainly seems that this

might be the case. Participants in the main identified a strong focus on education which some saw as incompatible with the kinds of programmes they felt they would prefer to run: programmes that offered holistic support to children. Such a focus on education some felt would not be appropriate for infants and toddlers, leading to the conclusion that unless parents needed care for their very young children because of employment commitments, these children would be better cared for in the home. Traditionally young children would have been cared for by the community and learning would have taken place in that community environment [21]. There appears an acceptance that school education rather than learning in the home and community is necessary for children to succeed in the modern world. Participants reported the push-down effect of school education into early childhood was something they felt parents and community supported.

Can Bhutan develop an early childhood profession that is uniquely Bhutanese rather than a reflection of western provision? Participants identified strong value positions which appear associated with Bhutanese rather than western culture. At the same time they identified the impact of western ideas: both from parents and community who focused on the importance of education rather than care, and in their own ideas of holistic provision amalgamating education and care and the valuing of learning through play. The challenge is to create a vision that treads neither path, but creates a new way that is uniquely Bhutanese. Those of us in the west can only watch and learn as these Bhutanese early childhood workers define and grow their profession.

REFERENCES

[1] Sims, M., *Is the care-education dichotomy behind us? Should it be?* Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 2014. 39(4): p. 3 - 11.

[2] Cheeseman, S. and J. Torr, *From ideology to productivity: Reforming early childhood education and care in Australia.* International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, 2009. 3(1): p. 61 - 74.

[3] Fenech, M., J. Sumsion, and W. Shepherd, *Early childhood teachers as professionals: Resisting sameness in early childhood education and care.* Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 2010. 11(1): p. 89 - 105.

[4] Hadfield, M., et al., *Longitudinal Study of Early Years Professional Status: an exploration of progress, leadership and impact. Final report*. Vol. DFE-RR239c. 2012, Wolverhampton: CeDare, University of Wolverhampton.

[5] Lumsden, E., *Early Years Professional Status: a new professional or a missed opportunity*, in *School of Education*2012, The University of Northhampton: Northampton Electroinc Collection of Theses and Research p. 495.

[6] Oberhuemer, P., *Conceptualising the early childhood pedagogue: Policy approaches and issues of professionalism.* European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 2005. 13(1): p. 5-16.

[7] Sims, M. and T. Hutchins, *Program planning for infants and toddlers. In search of relationships.* 2011, Castle Hill, NSW: Pademelon Press.

[8] Brennan, D., *The politics of Australian child care: from philanthropy to feminism*. 1994, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

[9] Sims, M., *Care and Education: Revisiting the dichotomy.* Early Child Development and Care, 1994. 103: p. 15 - 26.

[10] Roberts, J. and B. Kingston, eds. *Maybanke. A woman's voice. The collected works of Maybanke Selfe ~ Wolstenholme ~ Anderson 1845 - 1927*. 2001, Ruskin Rowe Press: Avalon Beach, NSW.

[11] Feez, S., *Montessori: the Australian Story*. 2013, Sydney: UNSW Press/NewSouth Publishing.

[12] Montessori, M., *The Montessori Method. Scientific pedagogy as applied to child education in "The Children's Houses" with additions and revisions by the Author*. 1912, New York: Frederick A Stokes Company. 216.

[13] Lawrence, E., ed. *Friedrich Froebel and English Education*. Vol. 145. 2012, Routledge: ondon and New york. 245.

[14] Roberts, J. and B. Kingston, eds. *Maybanke. A woman's voice. The collected works of Maybanke Selfe ~ Wolstenholme ~ Anderson 1845 - 1927*. 2001, Ruskin Rowe Press: Avalon Beach, NSW. 369.

[15] Sims, M., *Professional recognition.* Rattler, 2013. 105(Autumn): p. 20 - 21.

[16] Taggart, G., *Don't we care?: the ethics and emotional labour of early years professionalism.* Early Years: An International Research Journal, 2011. 31(1): p. 85 - 95.

[17] Productivity Commission, *Childcare and early childhood learning*. 2014, Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.

[18] O'Connell, R., *Paperwork, rotas, words and posters: an anthropological account of some inner London childminders' encounters with professionalisation.* The Sociological Review, 2011. 59(4): p. 779-802.

[19] Kingdom of Bhutan, *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan*. 2008, Thimphu, Bhutan: Kingdom of Bhutan. 75.

[20] Ura, K., et al., *A short guide to Gross National Happiness Index*. 2012, Thimphu, Bhutan: The Centre for Bhutan Studies.

[21] Pedey, K., *Parents grow old, children embody our hope. (Pha gee ba ta bu so)*, in *School of Education*2014, University of New England: Armidale, NSW. p. 157.

[22] Ministry of Education, *National policy on early childhood care and development.* , 2011, Royal Government of Bhutan, Ministriy of Education: Thimphu, Bhutan. p. 16.

[23] Black, I., *The presentation of interpretivist research.* Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, 2006. 9(4): p. 319 - 324.

[24] Kelliher, F., *Interpretivism and the Pursuit of Research Legitimisation: An Integrated Approach to Single Case Design* The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methodology, 2005. 3(2): p. 123 - 132.

[25] Primus, R., *Limits of Interpretivism.* Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy, 2009. 32(1): p. 159 - 177.

[26] Adams, P., *Exploring social constructivism: theories and practicalities.* Education 3-13, 2006. 34(3): p. 243-257.

[27] Keaton, S.A. and G.D. Bodie, *Explaining Social Constructivism.* Communication Teacher, 2011. 25(4): p. 192-196.

[28] Glaser, B., *The constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis.* Social Problems, 1965. 12(4): p. 436 - 445.

[29] Rockel, J., *"Swings or roundabouts?" Re-visiting changing views of care and education in the first years.* The First Years – Nga Tau Tuatahi - New Zealand Journal of Infant and Toddler Education, 2013. 15(1): p. 3 - 4.

[30] Chalke, J., *Will the Early Years Professional Please Stand Up? Professionalism in the Early Childhood Workforce in England* Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 2013. 14(3): p. 212 - 222.

[31] Bennett, J., *Starting Strong : The Persistent Division Between Care and Education.* Journal of Early Childhood Research, 2003. 1 (1): p. 21 - 48.

[32] Cooke, G. and K. Lawton, *For Love or Money: Pay, Progression and Professionalisation in the 'Early Years' Workforce.* London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2008.

[33] Sims, M., *The determinants of quality care: Review and research report.* , in *Kids Count: Better early education and care in Australia.* , E. Hill, B. Pocock, and A. Elliot, Editors. 2007, University of Sydney Press: Sydney. p. 220 - 241.

AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Prof. Margaret Sims

BA (Anthropology, Psychology) Auckland 1976
MA (Anthropology) Auckland 1978
PhD Auckland, 1984
Dip Mgmt New Zealand Institute of Management, 1988
Dip Ed Massey, 1995

Professor Sims is Professor of Early Childhood at the University of New England (2009 – current). Prior to this she was at Edith Cowan University (1992 – 2009) where her immediate past role was the Director for the Centre for Social Research. She has published extensively in early childhood with several texts the most recent of which are: (1) Programme planning for Infants and Toddlers: In search of relationships with T Hutchins: Sydney, NSW Pademelon Press, 2011 and (2) Social inclusion and the early years learning framework: Sydney, NSW: Pademelon Press, 2011. Her current research interests focus around professionalisation and leadership in early childhood education.

Professor Sims is on the Steering Committee for the Asia-Pacific Regional Early Childhood Network, is a member of the University of New England Council and is the immediate past editor of the *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*.

Karma Pedey

Born in Thimphu on March 3, 1970
BA (English and Geography) Sherubtse College, Kanglung, Bhutan. 1992
Post Graduate Certificate in Education, 1994, National Institute of Education, Samtse, Bhutan
MA (Eng.) Madras University, Chennai, India 1998
M.Ed. (Hons) in Early Childhood, University of New England, Armidale, Australia 2013

Karma Pedey is a lecturer and a researcher in Early Childhood and Communication at the Institute of Management Studies, Bhutan (2013-current). From 2011 to 2013 she pursued her higher studies in Early Childhood at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia. Before this she at the Office of the Vice Chancellor, Royal University of Bhutan as the Chief Human Resource Officer till 2011.

She has carried out several studies on Early Childhood which are, for instance: (1) Assessment of benefits of Early Childhood Care on School Readiness of Children (2) Infusion on Gross National Happiness in the Early Childhood Curriculum in Bhutan (3) Developed certificate level curriculum for Early Childhood in the Bhutanese Context (first of its kind in Bhutan).