THE INTERSUBJECTIVE PRODUCTION OF CHILEAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

A free associative group exploration of the unconscious aspects of professional subjectivities

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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This thesis, not including acknowledgements, bibliography and appendixes is 85, 230 words.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the production of early childhood (EC) educator subjectivities in Chile from a psychoanalytic perspective. Existing literature on EC professionalism has described how educators negotiate conflicting professional discourses; complying with standardised understandings of professionalism to legitimise their practice, while embracing the care dimension of EC education. While it has been suggested by critical scholarship that the EC workforce responds to these tensions by developing a unified professional identity, it is critical to foreground that EC educators constitute a complex, multidetermined type of professional subjectivity, whose experience of the struggles of the profession cannot be completely anticipated. Acknowledging the ambivalent, paradoxical and contradictory aspects of educators' singular engagement with their practice, opens the opportunity to explore some of its underlying dynamics and motives.

Drawing on the psychoanalytic concepts of the unconscious and free association, as well as my own professional interest in the potentialities of working with groups, I developed an innovative method to explore the unconscious aspects of these dynamics. I conducted free-associative group interviews with two groups of four EC educators each, using EC-related prompts like words and artefacts to stimulate their free associations and group discussions around their experience of EC practice. Free association's tracing of transitory elements of discourse does not so much encourage the production of coherent narratives as destabilises them, thus opening a contingent space for new articulations of subjectivity.

In the analysis chapters I explore the different types of discourse that emerged from particular group configurations, using the concepts of projective identification and intersubjective thirdness to make sense of the group dynamics that elicited these discourses. The intensified intersubjectivity of groups seemed to stimulate the mobilisation of unconscious affect, thus allowing to explore deep aspects of subjectivity. My analysis suggests that educators engage in the relational production of idealised professional identities, in order to find purpose and strength to navigate an emotionally demanding practice.

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IMPACT STATEMENT

This research is a contribution to problematising the way we think about teachers and their professional practice in highly neoliberal contexts. Specifically, I contribute with an elaborate account of the multiple dynamics involved in the formation of the professional identities of early childhood (EC) educators. My main argument is that these professional identities are produced in the interplay of complex unconscious dynamics, as a response to an ethically challenging and emotionally demanding practice. EC educators seem to aim at developing particularly strong, coherent professional identities, producing and performing them at an intersubjective level.

These substantive findings contribute to both the field of EC education studies and the growing field of psychosocial studies, given my foregrounding of the critical role of the unconscious in the negotiation of professional identities. Particularly, this research adds to the incipient body of literature on psychoanalytically informed empirical research by proposing a novel methodology to explore the unconscious aspects of teacher identities: free-associative group interviews. Free association offers an insightful data production method, whose effect of destabilising discourse allows to unveil new knowledge about the (free-associating) subject. At the same time, a group modality creates a lively context for data production, whose intensified intersubjectivity stimulates emotional expression. My theorisation of this intensifying effect is a concrete step towards identifying the distinctive way in which group functioning can optimise the expressive potential of free association as a research method. Overall, the methodological thinking I advance in my work has the potential to impact the way psychosocial research is conducted, highlighting the versatility of teacher groups as a research method for the exploration of professional identities.

At a societal level, this research has the potential to expand narrow understandings of how the professional identities of EC educators are enacted in their practice, emphasising the latter's high complexity and crucial impact on educational quality. For instance, by problematising societal views of what professionalism is in EC education and the ways in which EC educators are perceived by society and represented in educational policy. This research calls into question some of the assumptions that underlie canonical, hegemonic discourses of the EC profession that permeate civil society's debate on EC education, which tend to oversimplify and prescribe particular understandings of the struggles of the profession and depict educators as having limited professional agency. Similarly, my emphasis on the psychosocially embedded

character of educators' pedagogical relationships supports the imperative for educational policy to acknowledge the situatedness of EC practice; from curriculum, to professional development, to accountability. Regarding the latter, this study's foregrounding of the unattainableness of normative educator identities informs the critique of universalising prescriptions of teaching standards that aim to regulate teacher performance.

Lastly, my work underlines the often dismissed fact that EC educators are political subjects, whose deep knowledge about children and pedagogy transcends the classroom and thus should inform the societal debate on EC education. Raising awareness on the criticality of the educators' role in this discussion may significantly impact the way we understand policy enactment in EC education.

CONTENTS

List of tables

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the thesis

Introduction

This thesis critically examines the production of early childhood (EC) educator subjectivities in the current Chilean context, with a special focus on educators' own accounts of these processes in group contexts. Specifically, I used a psychoanalytically informed group methodology to explore the multiple ways in which EC educators narrated themselves, when prompted to consider their unconscious experience of their professional lives.

Nowadays, more than ever, myriad discourses on teacher identities circulate through Chilean society. Resting on the firm global consensus that EC education matters, Chile's government, academia, nearly every think-tank, and civil society are becoming increasingly vocal about who Chilean EC educators are and should (aim to) become. Historically, only a few of these discourses have been voiced by EC educators themselves, yet it can be argued that Chile's recent landscape of social unrest may open up new sites of articulation for educators, as for many other social actors.

In this introduction, I look back at the last ten years and make connections to recent events in Chile concerning EC educators in order to map the context, aiming to articulate some of the discourses that underlie the way EC educators are portrayed and envisioned in these instances. I argue that these present-day depictions of EC educators can be traced back to earlier moments of the EC profession in Chile, offering clues to some of its main tensions and paradoxes.

Firstly, I consider some recent instances where Chilean EC educators' work and professional trajectories were formally recognised, at a national level, with prizes and commendations; and the "Not just anyone can be an EC educator" campaign, a civil society organisations' effort to highlight the importance of EC educators' contributions to society. Then, I consider the recent legislative landscape of Chilean EC education, and revisit the October 2019 'Chile Woke Up' upheaval, as seen from the perspective of different social actors, with a special focus on unionised EC educators.

I end the chapter by outlining some of the possible contributions this thesis may offer to the understanding of Chilean EC educators' subjectivities.

1. When Chilean EC educators 'do well'

1.1 The 'Nobel Prize' for teaching

In this section, I recount the nominations received in the recent years by three Chilean EC educators for an important national award. These nominations are significant as they show the increasing profile of the EC profession in Chilean society, signalling an unprecedented recognition of the critical role and contribution of the sector, and ultimately symbolising nationwide gratitude for EC educators' labour and commitment.

In 2016, the Chilean NGO "Elige Educar"[1] ("Choose to Teach") launched the Chilean version of the Global Teacher Prize commonly referred to as "the Nobel Prize for teaching", an international competition that seeks to reward the most creative, committed and inspiring teachers around the world, who have had a significant impact on their students and communities. The overall objective of the award is to highlight the importance of the teaching profession. In the last three versions of the contest in Chile (2017, 2018 and 2019), there was an EC educator among the finalists.

Beatriz Saavedra, the finalist in 2017, was nominated by her peers and community because of her innovative use of EC education learning centres ('corners'). She created the "Television Corner", a television-shaped box through which children could create 'programmes' and convey their ideas, which soon became an articulation strategy between EC and primary education. Beatriz's work with learning centres then transcended the EC classroom, giving origin to "inter-classroom corners" which allowed school-level students to rotate among classrooms and work with different teachers[2]. She also developed an early stimulation programme and founded a community kindergarten in a rural area of her neighbourhood (Lincovil, 2017).

In 2018, Paulina Villarroel was nominated for her contribution to the dissemination of the Montessori methodology, and her committed work with vulnerable communities. After taking part in construction volunteer work in a very poor informal settlement, the 22 year-old Paulina with the help of a group of friends from university, constructed a

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[1] Elige Educar (Choose to Teach) is a Chilean public-private NGO that works independently under the Universidad Católica de Chile Public Policy Centre auspices, supported and funded by the Chilean Ministry of Education and private donors. Its focus is on teachers, as *'evidence shows teachers are the in-school factor that has the most impact on student learning'*, and one of its main advocacy targets is the attraction of new candidates to the teaching profession. Other Chilean NGOs with a focus on education issues are "Educación 2020" ("Education 2020"); "Enseña Chile" ("Teach for All Chile"); and "Fundación Oportunidad" ("Opportunity Foundation").

[2] This is unusual in Chile's state-funded education as EC and primary students tend to stay in their classroom and only work with their main teacher.

kindergarten for the community from scratch, '*shovel in hand*'. Faced with the fact that scarce EC educators were willing to come to work in such a vulnerable area, Paulina saw the potential for many mothers of the children of the kindergarten to work as facilitators themselves. Thus, in partnership with the Chilean Montessori Studies Centre, where she now teaches, Paulina granted scholarships to ten mothers to train as Montessori guides. These mothers are currently part of the pedagogical team in the kindergarten (Londoño, 2018).

Lastly, in 2019, Virginia Pérez was nominated in acknowledgement of her efforts towards community engagement. Her last initiative was the creation of an environmental project, based on a dream that one of her four year-old students had. The girl dreamt she flew over her community - a little village in Patagonia - and saw how pollution had started to invade the town. The dream inspired several environmental activities (e.g. garbage collection, community recycling, beautifying of gardens, etc.) and ultimately inspired the picture book "The flying girl", fully written and illustrated by Virginia's class, which gained them an invitation to attend the Design for Change - an international initiative - summit in Rome. Several authorities, institutions and the overall community contributed in different ways to the preparation for the trip, while the children visited several radio stations and newspapers presenting their project, showing how they had learnt Italian and sharing the challenges they had had to face. Other accolades for Virginia's career include the environmental certification of her kindergarten, and the acknowledgement of her research on forgotten cultures and traditions by two indigenous communities of her area (Tasca, 2019).

None of these three educators actually won the Global Teacher prize, yet their nominations and stories were widely disseminated and praised nationwide.

1.2 The National Prize for education sciences

On 27 August 2019 Victoria Peralta, an EC educator, academic, and teacher trainer won the Chilean national prize for education sciences. Since the prize was first presented in 1979, this was the first time it was awarded to an EC educator. Throughout her 50-year career, Victoria has devoted significant efforts to researching the history of EC education in Chile, and the crucial role many prominent women have had in the development of the profession and overall educational level in the country. After winning the award she seized every opportunity to clarify that Chilean EC education did not begin in 1944 with the creation of the first EC university degree - as many

people think - having instead a history of more than 156 years. This is why, while feeling very honoured, Victoria expressed her view that *'it was about time'* that EC education got such recognition and that there were multiple previous contributions to the field. Another point she raised in several interviews was that the high levels of illness among beginning EC educators were an indicator of the significant challenges that EC education had always faced since the mid-nineteenth century (24 Horas TVN Chile, 2019[3]).

1.3 Not just anyone can be an EC educator

On August 2019, "Elige Educar"[4] ("Choose to Teach") launched the campaign "Not just anyone can be an EC educator". One of the motivations for the campaign was the statistic that in Chile, according to CASEN[5] 2017, eighty-six percent of parents and carers who do not send their children to an EC education service think it is not necessary to do so. The campaign thus aimed to make visible EC educators' key role in fostering children's development, as they are *'the only ones that have the theoretical and practical tools children need for learning'* (Londoño, 2019).

Several questions on child development were circulated on social media in order *'to make clear* - as previously mentioned - *that only EC educators are prepared to deeply understand how children learn'*. Some of the questions were *"What is the name of the development period between zero and two years old?"; "What is children's scribbling stage?"; "What key developmental process relates to learning to clap?"; and "What is the stubbornness period?"* These and other questions were also used to conduct a live social experiment in Chile, in which an EC educator *'interrogated'* a group of people of different ages and contexts *'putting them to the test'* on early childhood issues (Londoño, 2019).

The live version of the test also demanded that participants choose, from among several options, which concrete manipulative aid would be most suited to teaching particular skills to children. For example, *"Which of these materials (abacus, drum and drumsticks, paper and pencils) would you use to foster children's mathematical skills?"* and *"Which of these materials (front buttoned apron, plastic bottle shaker, jumping rope)*

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[3] The full references of media articles can be found in Appendix 1.

[4] The same NGO in charge of the Global Teacher Prize. Its description can be found in footnote number 1.

[5] Encuesta de Caracterización Socioeconómica Nacional (National Socioeconomic Survey). It provides information on Chilean households and population, with the aim to inform the evaluation of public policies.

would you use to assess a child's fine motor skills?" The resulting video shows participants incorrectly answering all questions; the EC educator gives the correct answer to some of them, *"Wow, theory!"* an astonished participant exclaims. By the end of the video, participants give their impressions of the experience: *"I have children yet there were many things I didn't know, I felt very ignorant"*, one woman says; *"EC educators are the base for children to start developing their skills, I can confidently say now how important they are"*, a young man adds (Elige Educar, 2019).

According to Elige Educar, the campaign reached 8.6 million people, of whom 32,000 answered the questions on social media (Londoño, 2019). Other campaign activities included a competition in which two prospective EC education students won the opportunity to visit Paulina Villarroel's kindergarten; and a final masterclass taught exclusively by EC educators, including Victoria Peralta; and Claudia Lagos, an academic and teacher educator. The lecture - attended by 150 people and followed via streaming by 2,700 more - covered topics like the current challenges to teacher training and the professionalization of the field. *"EC education isn't seen any more as a matter of common sense or intuition, as evidence shows teaching young children is a complex and challenging labour that demands specialised knowledge, in order to boost children's brain development"*, Claudia asserts (Londoño, 2019).

EC educators 'success stories' (above) constitute a very recent addition to Chile's discourses on EC educators and the overall teaching profession and, it can be argued, were much needed to counteract Chilean EC educators' perennial marginalisation. Its emphasis on the required specialised knowledge and overall professional character of EC education's labour, seems to constitute a proportionate response to historical discourses of vocation that organised the profession's ethos around notions of femininity and sacrifice, still present to date.

Abett (2013) recounts the *Froebelian* inspiration behind Chile's first *kindergartens* in the second half of the nineteenth century. These underlined Froebel's notion of '*the mother made conscious*' as the standard teachers should be held to. She also describes the views of Leopoldina Maluschka - the first trainer of Chilean EC educators at the beginning of the twentieth century - who proposed educators' '*sincere love of children as [a key] aptitude to fulfil [their] mission with the happiest success*' (Maluschka, n.d.; in Abett, 2013). Abett continued to trace the association between vocation and love, *a peculiar view of vocation* (Ibid., p. 280), finding it again in a late 1940s women magazine advertisement which invited readers to join the profession, emphasising the selfless disposition it demands. Concordantly, Galdames (2018) has described how, in

the beginnings of the profession, Chilean female EC educators were expected to exhibit a dual vocation of service to the nation and to the Catholic Church. This was in line with the Christian character of Froebelian philosophy and despite the secular character of state-funded schools. The reason for this was the crucial role the Catholic Church played in the creation of the Chilean school system, giving the emergent school identity a missionary or apostolic stamp. Núñez (2004; in Galdames, 2018) named this concurrence of a missionary and republican vocation as: '*republican priesthood*'. Likewise, Montecinos (1990; in Galdames, 2018) describes Chilean EC educators as '*public mothers*', drawing on the notion that the symbol of the Mother Mary offers a foundational metaphor for Latin American female subjectivity.

In relation to the extent to which some elements of these foundational discourses may still prevail in Chilean society, Viviani (2016) found in her empirical research on '*the good early childhood educator*' that Chilean EC educators still think female practitioners must '*show great vocation, be constantly joyful, and give love and empathy to children'*. This is especially true for those who practice in vulnerable contexts, in what they deem to be a compensatory role. Conversely, when interviewing other groups of stakeholders (e.g. policy makers and training institutions), the need of disciplinary knowledge - for instance, in child development - was emphasised, without making any mention of religious, hygienic and nutritional roles that were formerly central to Chilean EC training. In this way, EC educators' own representations of professional identity seem to be colonised by discourses of selflessness and kindness. Similarly, Poblete (2018) agrees that foundational gendered and religious discourses still govern Chilean educators' *thoughts, actions and emotions*, thus promoting their exploitation (Ibid., p. 3). Poblete draws attention to the religious sense of the word vocation, understood as '*a call from God which is followed by priests and nuns, who renounce mundane life for a life of self-sacrifice, in the search of eternal salvation'* (Dawson 2005, Elias, 2003; in Poblete, 2018). In her empirical research, and like Viviani, Poblete found consensus among her participants that '*having a vocation*' is a critical attribute of the Chilean '*good educator*'.

Shortly after the emergence of this relevant body of research, 2019's Chilean society found EC education increasingly fighting this 'tenderness' discourse armed with 'Big Fish' narratives like those of the Global Teacher Prize finalists, whose stories seem to become ever more heroic and potentially setting a benchmark that is nearly impossible to achieve. What achievements will an EC educator need to present to aspire to a 2020 nomination? At the same time, the unprecedented nationwide acknowledgement of the

career of an EC educator further confirmed the crucial contribution of the profession; EC educators are finally seen in a dignified manner, worthy of their value.

The "Not just anyone can be an EC educator" campaign rides this wave of recognition of the work of EC educators in what can be characterised as a 'fight fire with fire' approach that aims to subvert the power asymmetries that EC educators have historically endured. EC educators are now the ones that look down on laypersons and their ignorance of EC education, in a somewhat vindictive assertion of their professional knowledge. It can be argued that this informs a reactive, potentially impoverished identity formation process, in which EC knowledge risks becoming reified and ultimately fixed in the attempt of keeping it at hand, ready to be produced for anyone who demands it, most importantly for EC educators themselves. This can be seen in the seemingly unquestioned - somewhat anachronistic - use of classic child development theories to inform the answers to the campaign's test, in which participants were expected to quote Piaget's sensorimotor period, elaborate on Lowenfeld's scribbling stage of drawing, or be aware of NAEYC-dictated developmental milestones. *'Wow, theory!'* a participant exclaimed in astonishment - when listening to the 'examiner' give these and other answers - in a way that appeared slightly mocking, yet that could ultimately signal how enigmatic the EC educator's 'bulletproof' relation to knowledge may seem to him.

2. When Chilean EC educators are not treated well (thus start to speak up)

2.1 The Chilean legislative landscape and the perils of covert neoliberalization

Two important bills concerning EC education are currently being discussed in the Chilean Congress: 'Universal access to nursery services'[6] (introduced for examination in August 2018), and the 'Funding system for EC education middle levels'[7] (introduced in March 2019). Right-wing president Sebastián Piñera sent both proposals directly to the parliament via presidential message. In February 2020, the Treasury was still assessing the 'Universal Nursery' project's viability, while the 'Middle levels funding' project has already been approved by Treasury and sent back to the Parliament Education Committee (Educación 2020, 2020). Both projects have been widely

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[6] For children between zero and two years.
[7] Middle levels cater for children between two and four years.

criticised by several policy centres, EC educators' unions, the College of EC educators, and several senators and MPs.

The 'Universal Nursery' bill proposes giving every eligible child $245. 000[8] Chilean pesos to attend nursery. However, this amount is considerably less than the average fee of private nurseries, thus risking the reinstitution of parental co-payment and its associated economic segregation of children. While the project aims to benefit 23, 000 children this could constitute a bottleneck in the future, as currently there are not enough middle level places to continue educating these children. Finally, the project seems to ignore the current shortage of EC educators and its impact on the quality of the provision which already places Chile as having the highest adult to child ratio (1 to 23) among OECD members, while the OECD average is below 1 to 14 (Educación 2020, October[9] 2018).

The 'Middle levels funding' bill, officially called the "Equity in EC Education" project, aims to reduce the disparity between state-funded and privately-subsidised kindergartens. In order to receive the funding, privately-subsidised kindergartens must have been awarded 'Official Recognition'[10] by the Ministry of Education. By June 2019, only 16 kindergartens had met this criterion and 220 were in the process of obtaining certification, while another 1, 599 kindergartens would need intervention to become eligible. Conversely, as privately-subsidised schools already have 'Official Recognition' (mandatory for all schools); this makes them the only providers currently able to provide middle level places in compliance with the regulations. The potential stimulation of competition among schools and concomitant creation of a 'kindergarten market' among schools may entail the early schoolification[11] of EC education (Segovia, June 2019).

Another much-disputed aspect of the bill has to do with the exclusion of state-funded kindergartens which cannot apply for this benefit. According to Segovia (2019), even the right-wing think-tank "Libertad y Desarrollo" stated that *every kindergarten must*

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[8] Around £243 British pounds.

[9] From now on, I will specify the month of each quotation, so to keep a sense of chronology of the evolution of the debates.

[10] 'Official Recognition' establishes requirements regarding staff qualification, adult to child ratio, infrastructure, and didactic materials. It is worth noting that 'Official Recognition' does not consider specific criteria relevant to EC education.

[11] Global trend whereby in preparing children for primary schools, pre-primary settings are required to implement a prescribed curriculum and focus on the development of children's academic skills to the detriment of [EC] curricula and pedagogy' (Brooks and Murray, 2016).

enter the new system'. Communist Party MP Camila Vallejo declared her *'deep ideological differences with the project and its introduction of marketization strategies'*; while a JUNJI[12]'s Union leader deemed the project's notion of 'voluntary contribution' from parents (to fund extracurricular activities) *'to constitute a hidden co-payment that contravenes the prohibition of for-profit education'. 'There is a risk indeed'*, asserts the EC education sub-secretary María José Castro, pointing to early schoolification and a compromise of EC education quality as possible unintended consequences of the project (Segovia, June 2019).

While the "Equity in EC Education" project was developed by the Ministry of Education, the 'Universal Nursery' project was exclusively put forward by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality, with a clear focus on women's labour and the caring aspect of EC provision. The project does not set any requirement in relation to the quality of the provision (e.g. educator training standards); this is why for Educación 2020 the project *'strengthens working parents' rights yet does not guarantee children's rights to quality education and care'* (Educación 2020, October 2018).

On 10 June 2019, INTEGRA[13]'s Union issued a statement declaring their rejection of the 'Middle levels funding' bill. Among their main observations, they pointed out that by excluding JUNJI and INTEGRA, the two main public providers, the project favoured the school sector and the creation of more private kindergartens. As a potential scenario, they foresee parents prematurely taking children out of kindergartens, so to secure a place in advance in high-demand schools (which will now cater for children from two years upwards), thus compromising public sector EC educators' employability. The following day, *'in a historic event, all union organisations of the EC education sector united to reject the 'middle levels funding' bill'*, calling for a strike to take place the following week (INTEGRA Union, June 2019). On the 18th of June, EC educators demonstrated in the streets in a massively attended protest march, *'standing against*

[12] The "National Board of Kindergartens" (JUNJI, for its acronym in Spanish) is a public self-governing institution created in 1970. Its purpose is to provide EC education to young children. It relates with the State through the Ministry of Education. JUNJI has its own free tuition kindergartens and funds private kindergartens through a 'Funds Transfer Programme'.

[13] INTEGRA, created in 1990, it is a private non-profit educational foundation that belongs to the Network of Foundations of the Sociocultural Management of the Presidency of the Republic. It is directed by the First Lady of the Republic and it relates with the Ministry of Education through an annual agreement. INTEGRA has its own tuition-free kindergartens and funds a small number of kindergartens through a Funds Agreement.

the Chilean government's attempt to introduce a new for-profit mechanism in education' (Cardoso, June 2019).

2.2 Chile Woke Up

On the 18th of October 2019, Chilean secondary students led a mass fare-dodging protest which soon expanded into a nation-wide protest (Bartlett, October 2019). What started as a response to a 30 pesos rise in the metro fare gave expression to frustration with Chile's living conditions: high prices, low wages, poor quality health care and education, and a privatised retirement system that leaves many older people in poverty. *'It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years'*, many protest signs read, denouncing the failure of the return-to-democracy promise that a free market would lead to prosperity and that prosperity would take care of the rest (Taub, November 2019).

There is widespread discontent with Chile's oligarchical government with some demanding the president resigns (Bunyan, October 2019); and a significant number of people calling for a new constitution, as the current one was enacted in 1980 under the military dictatorship (1973 – 1990) (BBC News, December 2019). On the 25th of October, more than one million people took to the streets of Santiago - Chile's capital city; they faced the police, who fired rubber bullets, tear gas and water cannons to disperse the protesters. Military forces were deployed for the first time since the country's return to democracy (Taub, November 2019), with the government declaring a state of emergency on the 19th of October, setting curfews in the largest cities (Bunyan, October 2019).

National and international human rights observers denounced these repressive responses and verified cases of unlawful deaths involving state agents; hundreds of people suffering eye trauma from pellets, and facing torture and sexual violence; and thousands of people detained (BBC News, December 2019). During the last week of January 2020, five more people died in protest-related incidents, with a total of 31 deaths since the beginning of the social upheaval in October 2019 (Ulloa, February 2020).

Three days after the first manifestations of social upheaval, the Chilean College of EC educators sent a letter to the president rejecting the government's call to send children to EC education centres *'as normal'*. To safeguard the security of the children and the workforce, they asserted they would not receive children in the kindergartens until the government revoked the state of emergency. They ended the letter making a call *'to go to the streets to protest against injustice, abuses, discrimination and subjugation to a*

neoliberal system that is killing and dehumanising us each day' (College of EC educators, October 2019).

The following day, national prize of education winner, Victoria Peralta wrote an open letter titled *"I ache for my country"* in which she described how she *'never thought we would see the military in the streets again, violence in every possible way, the persistence of injustice, insensibility; ultimately, the breakdown of our values'*. She aches for her country, where politicians *'failed to see what the Chilean people need'*. She ends her letter making a call to educators '*to have the strength to demand what is necessary':*

> 'We have kept silent without demanding what is essential, to have the conditions to educate human beings in the best way. We have tolerated academicist curricula, teacher frameworks that constrain our practice, and having to work with large groups of children compromising a more personalised work. We are trapped in kindergartens and schools, without experiencing life with its risks and opportunities. Will we be able to lift our country up? I think that, as many times before, we will' (Victoria Peralta, October 2019).

One week later, JUNJI's Union issued a letter to the president, requesting the overturn of the 'Universal Nursery' project, *'as it marketizes education from the cradle, and in doing that fails to protect children's rights, increasing the precariousness of working conditions'* (JUNJI Union, October 2019).

On 29th of October 2019, a peaceful demonstration of EC educators was unjustifiably dispersed with water cannons fired by police special forces, in spite of the absence of any conflict, clash or outrage. The aim of the protest was, as before, to demonstrate EC educators' rejection of the 'Universal Nursery' bill. The police's violent response appalled public opinion with diverse social actors shocked by the police's behaviour. Democratic Revolution MP Pablo Vidal deemed *'baffling how the police special forces acted against women who peacefully protested chanting and blowing whistles, instead of repressing vandals who destroyed public infrastructure'* (González & Delgado, October 2019). New Majority MP Karol Cariola asked *'Why are they attacking EC educators' peaceful demonstration carried out with peace and without violence? Why does the government prohibit them to do so?'*, while Comunes MP (chair of the Parliament Education Committee) Camila Rojas asserted *'"Universal Nursery, another way of profiting" the marching EC educators exclaim against the government project. Women protesting peacefully and still are shot with water cannons. Police don't stop lootings or fires but are the champions of repression'.* Two Twitter users added *'Water cannon going crazy against EC educators. Yesterday, when Alameda Avenue was being burned, complete absence. I cannot understand',* '*This is violence, the government insists on*

repressing the protesting people. THIS ISN'T THE RIGHT WAY MINISTER. Do you really think this is going to end soon? In Plaza Italia they are repressing EC educators, yes EDUCATORS' (Monzón, October 2019). Leonardo Honores - journalist with a well-known Chilean radio station - finally explained *'a video has just been sent to the radio, showing the repression of an EC educators' demonstration. Yes, early childhood E-DU-CA-TORS! If this is the toned down repression the head of police mentioned moments ago, then we just moved down to the minor league!'* (El Dínamo, October 2019).

Lastly, on the 15th of November 2019 the College of EC educators communicated their decision to postpone the celebration of the EC educator day ceremony in solidarity with the country's situation. *'We empathise with the pain of human life losses and the wounded, which prevents us from feeling celebratory. We demand a stop to the violence and the prompt elucidation of human rights violations. We think it is necessary to open up the debate for a new constitution, which truly involves the grassroot'* (College of EC educators, November, 2019).

As seen in this brief account of the most recent socio-political events that Chilean EC educators have engaged in, they have become increasingly vocal about crucial aspects that affect their everyday practice. This can be observed in the EC educators' college and unions' open defiance of what they deem to constitute inadmissible demands from the government, and their rejection of legislative projects that may intensify the precarious working conditions of their profession. While the government continues to neglect the EC profession, to the point of turning a blind eye to police ill treatment of peaceful EC educator protesters, it can be argued that EC educators' resistance - energised by Chile's current social mobilisation - is growing stronger than ever. They are brutally dispersed with water cannons, yet they keep protesting. In sum, in recent times, Chilean society has increasingly asked EC educators to give an account of themselves, an opportunity they have embraced and arguably succeeded in.

In this chapter, I have described some examples of the way in which Chilean EC educators have engaged with the recent shifting socio-political landscape and argued that this can be understood as a zeitgeist favouring the expression of the otherwise silenced subjectivities of several social actors. EC educators have ridden this zeitgeist, seizing the opportunity to examine their position within Chilean society, and are now being recognised nationwide for their labour for the first time, almost without exception (the government arguably constituting the one exception). In achieving this, EC educators have played along with standardising discourses of professionalism that, while conveying an impoverished view of the complexity of the EC profession, have

allowed them to validate and legitimise their practice. However, it is possible that a more crucial challenge for EC educators is not so much concerned with the way society depicts them, but with the exercise of their agency to produce their own accounts of themselves, resist subjugating policies and demand the fair treatment the profession deserves, beyond being symbolically recognised by society.

Arguably Chilean EC educators have already started to do this; defying unreasonable governmental demands, standing against iniquitous market-driven bills and - probably more importantly - doing this through unprecedented, joint inter-union efforts. This can be seen in EC educators' incipient yet consistent presence at recent demonstrations and the overall public debate in EC education; a debate they had not taken part in until very recently. In addition, there seems to be something upsetting about the politization of Chilean EC educators, as seen in the astonishing way in which the government responded to their protests. This may suggest there is something distinctive about EC educators which means that, even a slight shift in their positioning is seen as uniquely threatening.

The above sets a problem that is fruitful and necessary to look at, in order to gain insight about this perceived destabilising effect of EC educators' subjective expressions, and its concomitant suggestion of a complex, multidetermined type of professional subjectivity. In this thesis, I explore the production of these subjectivities from a psychoanalytic perspective, drawing on its suitability to produce complex accounts of intersubjective dynamics and its attention to elusive aspects of subjective experience.

A further reason why I chose a psychoanalytic approach to inform my research concerns my own dual professional background as a clinical psychologist and educational researcher. Early in my training as a psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapist and as a specialist in projective psychodiagnostics, I became aware of psychoanalysis' potential to offer a productive interpretive framework to make sense of social phenomena beyond the clinic. However, since my professional practice as a researcher in education was largely assessment-oriented, it was not until I had the opportunity to conceive this doctoral project that I was able to truly ponder the possibilities opened up by taking a psychoanalytic perspective. Notably, the opportunity to pose complex questions about EC educator subjectivities and the suggestion of free association as a relevant method to explore these questions with research participants. Both my decision to work with groups of EC educators in order to grasp some of the collective aspects that seem to characterise their professional subjectivation processes, and my engagement with their free-associative discourse give

23

this research a methodological distinctiveness, ultimately conveying the urgency of exploring novel ways to make sense of complex professional subjectivities.

CHAPTER 2

Literature review

Introduction

In this chapter, I give an account of the discussion of the main challenges and dilemmas faced by the early childhood (EC) education profession. These revolve, among other aspects, around notions of quality, professionalism, and the role of care in EC practice, all of which have an impact on the formation of EC educators' subjectivities, the focus of this thesis. I engage with reconceptualist, feminist and postmodern approaches in EC studies (for example, Deleuzoguattarian, and Foucauldian-informed perspectives), all of which inform the wider body of critical scholarship in the field while offering a productive framework against which to ponder the psychosocial stance of this thesis. One of the main projects undertaken in this body of literature, especially the reconceptualist perspective (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Cannella, 2012; etc.), aims at problematizing the pre-eminence of developmental psychology and its universalising prescriptions for best practice in EC education, embodied in the notion of developmentally appropriate practice (NAEYC, 2009). Reconceptualist scholars have been largely concerned with topics such as colonialism, power and privilege, underlining the political nature and socio-cultural embeddedness of any EC project. This literature opens the possibility of a fruitful dialogue with the psychosocial perspective that underlies this thesis. Both approaches can be considered to share an interest in the formation of the *EC subject*, whether the child or the educator, while offering productive understandings of key concepts such as discourse, agency and social structure. I will specifically focus on the Deleuzoguattarian scholarship in EC education by identifying points of dialogue with my psychosocial framework. Then, I will give a brief account of the psychoanalytic literature on teacher subjectivity that has informed my research. Finally, I will position my thesis in relation to the reviewed literature, identifying its potential contribution.

1. Critical approaches on the production of EC education' subjectivities

In this section, I give an account of the ways in which EC educators' main dilemmas and struggles have been conceptualised, especially from a postmodern perspective; notably, problematising contested understandings of professionalism and the care dimension of the profession, and its relation to structural aspects like the marked

feminisation of the workforce. Then I briefly review a body of research on teacher groups to offer insight into possible ways to look at how EC educators make sense of their practice. Subsequently, I review in detail a specific approach, the Deleuzoguattarian perspective, describing its theoretical underpinning and giving some examples of its application in research. Lastly, I consider the contributions of the reviewed critical approaches as a whole, appraising the opportunities they open and examining the possibility that there may be room for improvement.

1.1 From a unique workforce to the EC educator subject

In a strongly neoliberal and high accountability context the production of the EC educator subject has been characterised by a constant negotiation of discourses of quality, professionalism and professional identity. According to Moss (2016), the notion of quality has been brought into EC education as a part of the new public management revolution and the growth of the 'audit society' (Power, 1997; in Moss, 2016). Quality has become a highly instrumental narrative, according to which it is possible to obtain great profit from the social investment made in EC education as long as the *correct* technology, a high accountability system in this case, is applied in the *correct* manner (p. 10). Along the same lines Urban (2008) describes how, within a neoliberal discourse, the focus is on the production of educational outcomes while an evidence-based paradigm prescribes the implementation of *what works* (p. 143). Competitiveness becomes mandatory in such a context, where highly individualised accountability systems aim at a notion of quality that seeks educational achievement as an instrument of economic productivity.

According to Rose (1999; in Moss, 2016), the discourse of quality exemplifies a *human technology* that shapes behaviours in the hope of producing certain desired effects, while preventing undesired ones. It is a technology of *normalisation* as it sets norms against which performance can be assessed; a technology of *distance*, which assumes that individuals' performance can be compared regardless of its context; and a technology of *regulation* that offers a powerful management tool to govern at distance (p. 10). Similarly, Ball (2003) points out how these neoliberal systems exercise control and regulation through *monitoring systems* and the *production of information*. These mechanisms stimulate the development of technologies of performativity through which an individual's performance becomes the measure of their productivity and, ultimately, of their quality or worth (p. 216). These are the educational systems that

teachers have had to endure in the recent decades, instead of having the opportunity to reflect and develop their own educational meanings, values and purposes.

While school education has been subject to the abovementioned accountability processes for a long time, as EC education has only gained international attention comparatively recently, the sector has only recently had to engage with mainstream, global discourses of quality and been held accountable in relation to them. The reasons why EC education has been deemed to be important can be summarised in two ambitious goals: the achievement of economic prosperity and of social justice to advance human development (Moss, 2006; Urban, 2008; Chalke, 2013, etc.). According to Moss (2006), the first goal has been mainly addressed by facilitating women's reinsertion in the labour market, and by *turning* children into the productive citizens of the future. The way in which the second goal can be achieved is less clear as there is less consensus, yet the most common rationale is that EC education has the potential to narrow the inequity gap that negatively affects disadvantaged children. In his acclaimed study on the effects of high quality EC programmes on disadvantaged children, Nobel economics prize-winner James Heckman states that early interventions with children can significantly enhance outcomes for them as adults. Heckman et al. (2013) list children's future education, employment and salaries, enhanced participation in healthy behaviours, and reduced engagement in crime, alongside many other improved areas. Heckman further states the high cost-effectiveness of EC interventions as a tool to address wider societal issues (p. 2). According to Engle et al. (2007), it is crucial for this type of intervention to be implemented as early as possible, because early events in a child's life will have the biggest effect on their productivity and ability to learn throughout their life course (p. 237). While adverse experiences in EC increase negative social and health outcomes; receiving stable and responsive caregiving with opportunities to learn in a safe environment will promote healthy child development (Chan, 2013 p. 1514). Concordantly, as the achievement differences between children from different socioeconomic groups tend to widen over time, the earlier the intervention, the greater its potential to reduce disparities (Engle et al., 2007 p. 237). Ultimately, these interventions represent an investment in a country's future workforce and capacity to thrive economically (Chan, 2013 p. 1514).

This focuses attention on the workforce in charge of implementing these strenuous goals. The notion of professionalism thus emerges as a means to guarantee quality educational provision since a linear causality between professionalism and quality is implied. As Chalke (2013) states, in most neoliberal systems, the definition of quality is

constructed around norms and regulations. Therefore, from this perspective, acting professionally consists in meeting the regulations. For Taggart (2011), this shows the inconsistency of a societal discourse that, on the one hand demands credentials and professionalism from a neglected workforce while, on the other hand offers them scarce support and few opportunities to exercise professional autonomy.

The Cinderella of the education system (Dalli, 1993; in Dalli et al., 2012, p. 3), the EC education sector has historically been undervalued and unfunded. It has been noted that these attributes strongly relate to specific characteristics of its workforce; its high levels of feminisation and the crucial role of the care aspect of everyday practice. The intensively gendered character of the workforce has also been linked to discourses of maternalism and vocation; both problematic for several reasons. Notably, they have been used to justify the precariousness of women's working conditions (Hammond et al., 2015), supporting the idea that educating children comes naturally to women, thus constituting it as a labour that should be done on a voluntary basis (Chang-Kredl, 2015) and which does not require professional training.

The naturalisation of EC education as an easy, feminine occupation, understands it as the enactment of a biologically determined maternal instinct (Moss, 2006; Chalke, 2013; Duncan, 1996, Ailwood, 2008; in Warren, 2014). This association between EC education and motherhood goes back to the beginnings of the field. For example, Friedrich Froebel depicted the EC educator as 'the mother made conscious' (Steedman, 1985; in Ailwood, 2007), in contrast to the *actual* mother, whose work of childrearing should not be replaced but complemented (May, 1997; in Ailwood, 2007). Around the end of the nineteenth century, Maria Montessori's educational theory of EC education kept the role tightly linked to motherhood; in spite of introducing a scientific pedagogy based on psychological principles, she still relied on the figure of a loving mother as the indispensable implementer of the education of young children (Ailwood, 2007). Maternalist discourses of EC education have been described as promoting an ideal of a martyred caring mother, whose selfless service makes the profession especially amenable to exploitation (Taggart, 2011 p. 90). This has been observed in educators' subjugation of their needs to the welfare of others in what has been described as a 'compassion trap' (Sumsion, 2005; in Warren, 2014 p. 263). At the same time, the understanding of EC education as the continuation of a mothering role has been historically used to justify the notably low remuneration (Yeo, 2005; in Ailwood 2007). Taggart (2011) has further posed vocation as a double-edged sword, often associated with self-sacrifice and burnout, instead of enjoyment and satisfaction (p. 86).

Maternalist discourses are still quite prevalent in EC education (Rosen, 2019). A feminine sensitivity and sense of empathy are still seen as common attributes of both mothering and EC practice (Thomson & Kehily, 2010), thus conflating a maternal disposition with the care aspect of the profession. In terms of the role of care in EC education, Manning-Morton (2006) states that EC educators practise in the liminal space between teaching and care. In this sense, educators can be seen as professional boundary-crossers (p. 50). Beyond maternalist views on care, Taggart (2011) advocates for an understanding of EC education as a care profession, in which care constitutes a social principle. Harwood et al. (2013) share this perspective, further asserting an ethics of care as essential to professionalism in EC education. Caring, in the context of EC education, has been described as involving rationality, emotionality, and a willingness to undertake an emotional labour (Hochschild, 1980, in Taggart, 2011; Rabin, 2019) that demands an emotional engagement with children (Nutbrown & Page, 2008; in Chalke, 2013). Therefore, there is wide consensus that EC education constitutes a relational and ethical practice that does not fit easily within traditional understandings of professionalism (Moyles, 2001; Manning-Morton, 2006; Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2010; Dalli, 2011; Taggart, 2011; Urban, 2008; Warren 2014; etc.).

As Urban (2008, p. 139) points out, traditional understandings of what a profession is describe it as being inserted in a system of knowledge production and application specific to particular occupations. Similarly, Moss (2006, p.38) describes how professionalism is often concerned with establishing and asserting clear professional boundaries through, among other things, a knowledge monopoly and control over who may practise. Concurrently, Vincent and Braun (2011) point out the contrast between 'traditional' professions (often described as demanding expert knowledge, entry qualifications and extended training) and care professions, which tend to be seen as morally worthy and demanding great vocation and altruism (p. 774). Such constrained understandings of professionalism leave out aspects that are critical to EC practice. Thus, alternative frameworks are required in order to grasp what professionalism is, its relation to quality, and what this may look like in EC education.

Postmodern scholars like Peter Moss, Gunilla Dahlberg, Alan Pence, Gaile Canella and Susan Grieshaber, are among those who took the first steps towards the problematisation of the notion of quality in EC education and its effects on the formation of practitioners' identities. In their 1999 book 'Beyond quality in EC education and care', and subsequent reeditions, Moss, Dahlberg and Pence point out how the use of the notion of quality constitutes not a necessity but a choice which

emerged from the adoption of a specific position and its associated assumptions, beliefs and values (Moss, 2016). Acknowledging this could potentially allow freeing people from subjugation to a particular definition of quality, underlining that there are other languages of evaluation available (p. 8). Further elaborating on the deconstruction of quality in EC education, Pence and Moss (1994; in Moss, 2016) highlight its relative, constructed and subjective nature which is highly dependent on the 'eye of the beholder'. In this sense, following Massumi (2016; in Moss, 2016), quality can take on many diverse meanings to the point of losing discursive meaning and further utility as an evaluation tool. Therefore, Dalberg underlines the need to defy the languages of 'technology and normalisation' (2007; in Urban, 2014) and the importance of contextualising the work with quality, not only spatially and temporally, but also towards the acknowledgement of cultural differences and other forms of diversity.

In order to envision an EC educator who can cater for the diversity and complexity of EC practice, Moss (2006) claims it is necessary to transcend the non-professional/professional divide. As Dalli (2011) adds, professionalism in EC education should be about being fully present, creative and agentic. Similarly, Urban (2008) highlights how a professionalism based on a hierarchical discourse of expert knowledge would not be appropriate for EC education, therefore advocating for a relational professionalism that may open the possibility of dialogic research and non-prescriptive co-constructions of knowledge. Authors like Osgood (2006, 2010, 2012, etc.), Manning-Morton (2006) and Warren (2014), have advanced the notion of relational professionalism. For Osgood (2010), as the construction of the identities of EC educators is deeply rooted in their biographies, what is needed is a 'professionalism from within', in order to trouble hegemonic discourses (p. 126). Similarly, Manning-Morton (2006) states that professionalism in EC education is personal, thus its definition should take into account the high levels of physical, emotional and personal knowledge and abilities that the relationship with children demands. From this perspective, educators should be able to reflect on their relations with children not only under a theoretical lens, but also from their personal and subjective stories and their emotional, bodily and present experiences (p. 42).

In terms of what the teachers' experience of this overall structural context is, there are several studies that explore the experiences and challenges of student teachers as they go through their training and start to form their professional identities. Britzman (2003 in Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014), has pointed out how challenging it is for

preservice teachers to start constructing their own discourses on EC education as they enter a world that is already populated by others' discourses. In terms of reasons for entering the profession, Chang-Kredl (2015) has described how students tend to enter the field with idealised expectations often stating that they chose the career because they love children. At the same time, Brennan (2017) found that on several occasions student teachers mentioned the maternal aspect of EC education as one of their reasons for starting their training.

Several studies have explored the teachers' experiences of the maternal aspects of EC education and its role in the formation of their professional identity. Thomson and Kehily's (2010) research on EC teachers who had recently become mothers found that participants agreed that teaching and mothering shared terrain, while at the same time they made significant efforts to delineate clear boundaries between both spheres. Van Laere et al. (2014) found that EC workers often connected their job with their own mothering and with a natural ability to love children. In terms of the role of gender in EC education, Farquhar et al. (2006 in Van Laere et al. 2014) point out that EC services have historically been promoted, provided and used by women (p. 235). Rosen (2019) observes how women in the EC education and care sectors are doubly burdened, as they engage in care work both in their workplace and at home. Chang-Kredl (2015) describes feminist engagements with the EC field, stating that feminists' main focus (especially second wave feminists mostly concerned with inequality) has been to support women's insertion into work, thus instrumentalising the role of educators as child carers. Similarly, Chang-Kredl (2015) has described how second wave feminists have been said to vilify motherhood as a subjugated aspect of women's identity.

Regarding teachers' engagement with discourses on professionalism, several contradictory aspects have been pointed out. Vincent and Braun (2011, p. 775) describe how professionalism has traditionally been measured by the degree of autonomous control available to employees; that is, the possibility of autonomously exercising professional judgement. However, EC educators practise within professionalism discourses that allow distant control in a surveillance context that aims at progressing from an external governmentality to an internal self-governance (Pupala et al., 2016). EC teachers have been described as stressed, worried and frustrated about this surveillance, which Madrid and Dunn-Kenney (2010) have conceptualised as a persecutory guilt that leads to self-regulation and self-policing. Pupala et al. (2016) characterise this understanding of professionalism as a bureaucratic scientisation of the EC profession that produces bureaucratic

subjectivities. According to what they found in their research, teachers do not seem to question the hyper bureaucratisation of their profession; they seem in fact to play along with it and to use the norms and standards to validate and legitimise themselves. While this allows them to differentiate themselves from 'babysitters', it constitutes an engagement with a discourse of professionalism that ultimately undermines their autonomy (p. 663).

In terms of the role of emotion, Madrid and Dunn-Kenney (2010) observed in their research participants a tacit agreement that emotions should be neutralised as a part of professionalism. When Brennan (2017) asked EC educators about their feelings in relation to their practice, they only really mentioned empathy towards children, seemingly trying to keep their responses framed within an understanding of professionalism that did not include affect. In terms of the tensions between EC education and the school level, Gibson (2013) found that her participants, EC practitioners, tended to think that working at the school level is better than practising in an EC context. This was especially the case with those who were working towards a university degree in EC education. Finally, Ortlipp et al. (2011) point out how teachers' tendency to 'run away' from the care aspect of the profession, may lead to an undesired effect of schoolification.

Dalli, Miller and Urban, in their book 'Early childhood grows up' (2012), describe EC education and care as a profession 'that now thinks and speaks for itself' (p. 6), somehow suggesting it is a workforce that is possible to envisage as a united whole. The EC profession has often made claims of constituting a distinct community; for instance, a relevant body of literature poses a distinctive affective dimension that is nearly unique to EC practice. In spite of the societal mandate for neutralising emotion as a means to enter the professional arena, there is agreement within the field - as mentioned above - that EC education constitutes an emotional labour (Hochschild, 1980, in Taggart, 2011) that demands an emotional engagement with children (Nutbrown & Page, 2008, in Chalke, 2013). In this context, it has been pointed out that, the younger the children, the more intense is the emotional involvement of educators (Hargreaves, 2000; in Harwood et al., 2013; Manning-Morton, 2006).

In addition, it has been suggested that EC educators, unlike other professions, exhibit a distinctive passion for their work (Moyles, 2001), often finding great emotional pleasure in their relationships with children in the context of their practice (Warren, 2014 p. 266). In dialogue with the professionalism debate, Page (2017) has offered the

alternative framework of 'professional love' to characterise educators' intellectual and emotional capacity to establish a relationship of professional attachment with children. Page deems the implementation of these relationships with very young children in the EC context to be especially challenging as they entail very intimate interactions that must remain appropriate, without compromising meeting children's needs in an attuned, responsive manner.

While there is awareness among authors of the fragmentation of the workforce, given the structural disparities in the professional backgrounds and status of educators, there is an ongoing discussion around the fact that EC educators seem to have a somewhat uniform experience of belonging to the workforce, in terms of how the profession is perceived and the professional identities the educators embody. For example, Osgood (2004, 2005; in Osgood, 2006) has argued that, despite the many differences and peculiarities throughout EC provision, the workforce shares a common set of values and experiences the effects of policy in similar ways (p. 196). Osgood further states that, as an ethic of care and emotional labour are pivotal to educators' understanding of themselves, they offer the starting point to pose a feminist 'professionalism from within' that is infused with confidence, pride and self-belief (pp. 193-194). In agreement, Chang-Kredl and Kingsley (2014) point out how the perception of a shared contribution to society may give the EC workforce a sense of resilience.

The literature on EC educators' identities seems to show awareness of the challenging contexts in which they negotiate their subjectivities within discourses on qualifications, professionalism, maternalism, and care values (Warren, 2014). However, there seems to be a tension between the acknowledgement that there is not one single EC educator identity (Fairchild, 2017), what seem to be idealised views on what these identities should look like, and a desire to contribute to forging a strong unified workforce identity. For instance, Ortlipp et al. (2011) seem to provide a definition of professional identity as experienced by the workforce as a whole, and even to suggest that a unified professional identity would be desirable. Similarly, normative aspects emerge when discussing teacher professional identities, as seen in Melasalmi and Husu's (2018) suggestion that there actually is such thing as a successful professional identity formation process (p. 104); while for Osgood (2006), a shared collective identity may offer resistance to policy imposition and, ultimately, be a means to emancipation.

In sum, it can be argued that what the literature finds diverse are the conditions of the production of teacher subjectivities, especially regarding educators' working conditions; yet the aim seemingly is to produce a particular kind of politicised educator who shares a specific vision of what the struggles of the workforce are.

1.2 The role of teacher groups

There is a growing body of literature concerned with the exploration of teacher groups. However, the productivity of working with these groups has mostly been explored in relation to collaborative experiences of professional development, the creation of best practice and pedagogical and content knowledge. In general terms, what takes place in teacher groups has been defined as social learning: a learning partnership in which teachers undertake learning activities in collaboration with colleagues, with a direct focus on their own classroom practice (Doppenberg et al., 2012; Van den Beemt et al., 2014; in Vrieling et al., 2016).

There are several modalities of teacher groups, most of them emphasising similar aspects of collaborative work while exhibiting some differences in their work methodologies. Some examples are teachers' inquiry groups (Nieto, 2003; Hamre & Oyler, 2004; Gasoi et al., 2016; etc.) and critical friends groups (Kuh, 2016). Gasoi et al. (2016) describe the Washington Teachers Inquiry Group's use of the 'Descriptive Review of a Child' methodology, in which the teachers' reflective processes are organised around a specific question a teacher has about a particular student (p. 279). Similarly, Kuh (2016) describes critical friends groups (CFG) as typically site-based groups of no more than ten teachers who examine student work and their teaching practices (p. 294). CFGs may use methods such as protocol-driven structured conversations with a focus on the improvement of practice and of children's learning experiences (p. 293). Following Himley (2000), Hamre and Oyler (2004) have pointed out teacher inquiry groups' reliance on face-to-face interactions, continuity and commitment over time, and a degree of trust and mutuality, to produce a deep understanding of teaching practice (p. 156). Similarly, McCotter (2001) describes collaborative teacher groups as characterised by dialogue, support, reflection, critique and collaboration. McCotter (2001) further argues that groups of colleagues may constitute a 'sacred space' which, according to Richardson (1997; in McCotter, 2001), must at least comprise people feeling: safe within the group, connected to the other members, passionate about their joint work, and grateful for what the group offers. Groups of this kind have also been called 'connected knowing groups' (Belenky et al.,

1986; in McCotter, 2001), to which members bring provisional knowledge and ask others to nurture it (p. 690).

Teacher groups have been deemed beneficial for several reasons. They offer one of the most powerful and cost-effective forms of teacher learning (Little, 1999; in Kuh, 2016) while acting as an antidote to the extensively documented isolation that characterises teacher practice (Barth, 1990, Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001, Lortie, 1975, Rosenholtz, 1989, Tyack & Cuban, 1995; in Kuh, 2016; Nieto, 2003; Lieberman & Miller, 1992, Waller, 1961; in McCotter, 2001, etc.). Researchers have highlighted teacher groups' aim of producing change in cognition and/or behaviour (Vrieling et al., 2016) boosted by the mutual support teachers give to each other (McCotter, 2001).

The emotional, interpersonal and subjective aspects of participating in teacher groups have been explored with a marked interest in their role in the groups' effectiveness. For instance, Laferrière et al. (2006; in Vrieling et al., 2016) have underlined the need for group members to display adequate metacognitive competencies, as the effects of learning will vary depending on participants' self-regulation skills (p. 279). It has been argued that teachers undergo shared development processes (Urban & Swader, 2016; in Melasalmi & Husu, 2018) from which shared identities emerge. For Vrieling et al. (2016), teacher group members' sense of shared responsibility and interdependent work towards a common goal can result in a shared identity (Knapp 2010; in Vrieling et al., 2016) crucial to the promotion of collective reflection and open dialogue, both necessary to enhance learning (Ohlsson, 2013; in Vrieling et al., 2016). Similarly, the development of cohesive interpersonal ties has been described as a critical condition for the sharing of knowledge (Agterberg et al., 2009; in Vrieling et al., 2016). Nieto (2003) describes how the work with 'teaching autobiographies' in the context of inquiry groups, can be used as a tool for teachers to reflect on their profession. Specifically, teachers are asked to ponder how their backgrounds or experiences may have influenced their decision to enter and stay in the teaching profession, as a means for them to connect more effectively with their students (p. 391).

In terms of what teacher groups and their study may bring to the exploration of teacher subjectivity, their concern with aspects of teachers' subjective experience can be deemed largely instrumental. Teachers' self-knowledge seems to be predominantly useful in order to stimulate change, as seen in the abovementioned use of 'teaching autobiographies' as a group technique. The aim is for teachers to learn about their practice, yet not necessarily about themselves in a wider or deeper sense; their

individual identities are mainly considered important insofar as they affect the development of group identity, crucial to the consolidation of effective learning. The inquiry group approach exemplifies a perspective with a clear focus on the student which declaredly aims at reaching objectivity (Gasoi et al., 2016), claiming it is possible for teachers to suspend their value-laden perceptions of students. In this sense, teacher group perspectives may develop mildly naïve understandings of group dynamics. This can also be seen, for example, in McCotter's (2001) claim that power hierarchies are hardly at play in collaborative groups with no formal leadership, or that politics is less likely to be present in groups of teachers who do not work in the same place (p. 691). In sum, it can be argued that more research on 'non-professionally-oriented' groups of teachers, that pays attention to other aspects of their experience of groups, is needed to articulate what happens to teachers between 'the workforce' and 'the individual'.

1.3 Deleuzoguattarian perspectives

Within postmodern approaches to EC education research there is a specific body of literature that draws on the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari; several of their concepts have been applied in the EC field in a very prolific way. Liane Mozere (2006; 2007; etc.), Gunilla Dahlberg and Peter Moss (2005), Glenda MacNaughton (2004; 2005), Jayne Osgood (2013; 2015; etc.) and Maggie MacLure (2010; 2013; etc.) are among the scholars who have worked from this perspective. Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy informs new materialist and post humanist thought which have, among other things, underlined the importance of attending to aspects of experience that transcend the representational realm such as the body and the material world, including that which is *non-human* or *more-than-human*.

One of the core aspects of the Deleuzian project is a refusal of the primacy of language and its dependence on representations as the main means through which we give an account of our experience of the world. For Deleuze (1994; in MacLure, 2013), representational thought is 'sedentary', categorical and judgemental, making material realities inaccessible to the discursive attempts to represent it (p. 659). Language then constitutes the 'metaphysical surface' on which words and things meet and the distinction between them is played out (Deleuze, 2004 p. 278; in MacLure, 2013 p. 663). A thought that is not 'sedentary' constitutes a 'nomad' thought, which is not constrained by the notion of interiority or of a fixed identity, and can freely move through elements of exteriority (Massumi, 2002 p. 5; in Osgood et al., 2013 p. 214). A second aspect has to do with the role of the body and its relation to language. Language

belongs to, is issued from, and is impeded by the body; yet when it leaves the body it becomes immaterial, ideational, representational, ultimately turning into a cultural resource and opening a collective space. However, this collective space has been characterised as crossed by *lines of flight* that open onto the new by escaping representation and the capture of meaning (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 p. 278; in MacLure, 2013 p. 664).

Deleuze proposes the notion of *assemblage* to characterise the encounter of bodies, things, words, signs and modes of expressions at the same ontological level. As a result of this, it is made clear that language does not possess the externality required to represent the world by establishing logical relations between propositions. This has been described as a passage from a representational 'logic of *instead*' to the assertion that things relate to each other in a material-discursive 'logic of *and*', thus signalling the absence of the principle of contradiction, among other aspects (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, Lecercle, 2002; in MacLure, 2013 p. 660).

As Cumming et al. (2015) explain, assemblages constitute arrangements of elements that can include, among other things, humans, other-than-human beings, places, sensations and time. Assemblages, they continue, come together for particular functions that shape them, exceeding what any of the elements could have produced on its own. The constant combination and recombination of elements has been denominated an endless process of *becoming* (p. 82). In terms of the role of the body, bodily sensations, like having a 'gut reaction', are accepted as important parts of how assemblages work, as they constitute affect (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; in Cumming et al., 2015), whose movement can produce change (p. 91).

Maggie MacLure (2013) has described, as characteristic of a Deleuzian engagement with research, an understanding (and experience) of research data as *glowing* or *having a glow*. She has further described her work as constituting post qualitative research which aims at transcending a representational engagement with data. For instance, by not trying to interpret it, as the notion of interpretation itself would suggest it is possible to stand outside data. While coding and categorising data may reveal patterns and regularities, it would constitute a knowledge production process that entails the risk of stasis and closure (p. 662). Data is then understood by MacLure as having a distributed and undecidable agency (p. 661) to 'make themselves intelligible to us', which can be 'felt (…) when one becomes especially interested in a piece of data' (p. 660). The glow that certain data have can be described as constituting

affect, thus having an embodied aspect that exceeds propositional meaning (p. 661). As examples of glowing data, in the context of a research project on children's behaviour in EC classrooms, she mentions the incomprehensibility of the silence of a girl when the register was taken each morning, or the vomit of a child every day before lunchtime. This type of data did not survive any sort of coding, mesmerising the research team (p. 663).

Fairchild (2017) applies Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *segmentarity* (1987; in Fairchild, 2017) to explore how policy and professional bodies assess and prescribe the achievement of specific kinds of professional identities in the EC context, and proposes an alternative understanding of identity formation processes as moments of becoming (p. 295). She also draws on the notion of 'stuttering' (Deleuze, 1997, MacLure, 2010; in Fairchild, 2017), described as moments of perplexity, which may open the possibility to resist the 'segments' (p. 296). In such moments, language becomes derailed from a linear process of meaning making, thus disrupting representational thinking and opening it to a process of becoming (Deleuze, 1990, 1997; in Fairchild, 2017 p. 299). Segmentarity describes the way in which the social, material and spatial world are ordered and compartmentalised through the establishment of binaries, circular and linear segments. Examples of binaries can be social class, men and women, adult and child; circular segments may consist in concentric circles organised around bodies or processes; and linear segments often reflect a journey through space and time (p. 297).

As Fairchild argues, an example of binary segmentarity in the EC context could be the division between the student teacher and the practitioner. Similarly, circular segmentarity may be seen in how novice students often remain on the periphery of EC practice, given their inchoate knowledge and skills. Finally a linear segmentarity can be observed in the above mentioned expectations for students to go through an orderly professional identity formation process. Segments can be characterised as rigid or *molar* or as supple or *molecular*, in attention to their flexibility and capacity of movement. Molar segments 'organise, manipulate, and reproduce' aspects of society in a prearranged manner (Goodchild, 1996; in Fairchild, 2017), while molecular segments can escape rigid control (p.298). In her research, Fairchild observed molecular moments between her (student teacher) research participants and the children, as seen in supple segments of messy play and encounters with nature. At the same time, participants experienced the limits of rigid segments like the materiality of the classroom itself, while transcending them, for instance, by playing with children in the corridors, in an escape from the molar (p. 304).

Osgood et al. (2013) have also applied Deleuzian concepts to their research with EC educators. Following Ringrose (2012; in Osgood et al., 2013), they understand the Deleuzian conceptual tools as a 'geophilosophy' that opens up the possibility for affective forces to break free from normative regimes (p. 208). Their research explored the narratives of mothers who do not systematically participate in their children EC centres' activities, thus being labelled in a molar manner as 'hard to reach' parents. The researchers found affective contradictions within social structures, where the pathologising ways in which these parents are constructed are not problematised (p. 209). Drawing on Cole (2011; in Osgood et al., 2013), the researchers assert the affective as offering ways to analyse power relations between bodies and assemblages, mapping flows of energy and desire (p. 213). Ultimately, they see Deleuze and Guattari's contribution as offering new evidence that it is possible to resist (not necessarily in a conscious manner) unitary, molar identity formations (p. 217).

There are several points in common between the Deleuzian and psychoanalytic perspectives as both approaches challenge ideas like that of a centred subjectivity, rational agency, or the possibility for identity to be fixed or stable. This can be seen in Liane Mozere's (2006) critique of identity as a keystone of capitalism and tool of micro subjugation, and her assertion of the role of unconscious desire in undermining identity. As she further elaborates, desire, in a Deleuzian sense, has the capacity to escape the disciplinary mould through lines of flight, enabling a subversion of the systems which are based on assigning identities to subjects (p. 110). Mozere (2007) has also discussed the place of gender in EC education, stating that the competence of female educators must depart from a history and tradition of normalisation in the profession. This may be done by aiming at opening lines of flight (or *lines of wandering*, as she calls them) to give expression to desire (p. 291).

Nevertheless, the use of Deleuzian tools may become at times a sort of 'term-dropping' exercise, in which (against *nomadic* thinking) relations or instances seem to merely be named and classified under Deleuzian categories. Similarly, it can be argued that empirical research informed by this perspective tends to discuss data in a quite unspecific way, maybe given the constraints of trying to transcend representation. The fact that the experience of being surprised by the data is only explained in terms of the data's agency discards the possibility for that surprise to be an indication of other instances at play, like the unconscious.

1.4 The contribution of critical approaches

According to Osgood and Robinson (2017), one of the main contributions of feminist and post-structuralist scholarship is the challenging of the hegemony of scientific, determinist discourses (p. 37); offering instead more fluid accounts of subjectivity, with a focus on the multiple, shifting and contradictory relations of power, agency and deconstruction at play in subject formation (p. 40). As biological, determinist discourses still permeate EC education, this contribution remains crucial to the field (Robinson and Davies 2008; Osgood 2012). Concurrently, Osgood and Robinson (2017) have pointed out how recent attention to bodily, material and affective aspects of EC subjectivities, has introduced a rupture in the way children, and EC practice and research are thought about (p. 43). Specifically, a post-humanist approach has allowed for an understanding of EC identities as generated in the relation with objects and spaces in a constant becoming (p. 44).

In terms of the key topics that concern critical perspectives on EC education; feminist, postmodern and reconceptualist approaches have advanced, among many other contributions, a shared agenda of: denouncing the exploitation of the workforce, politicising and empowering EC educators, and addressing overall issues of power and inequity (Lenz Taguchi, 2005; MacNaughton, 2005; Dalli, Miller & Urban, 2012, etc.). Authors with a Deleuzoguattarian perspective, in particular, have been very vocal about their political project of deconstructing rigid regimes, therefore devoting significant time to highlight the possibilities that its conceptual framework opens. For example, Davies (2017) notes how a Deleuzian approach to research data is not only epistemological but also ontological as it concerns bodies and their effect/affect on each other while pointing out (following Deleuze, 1992; in Davies, 2017), that the act of categorization not only deals with what has taken place, but actively produces what is to come. This realisation has made clear the necessity to introduce more fluid concepts, in order to make sense of the 'entangled enlivening of being' (Barad, 2007; in Davies, 2017 p. 66).

The above entails principled ethico-political positionings, much needed to the field. However, it is possible for certain discussions that occur within these frameworks to become slightly prescriptive, or to oversimplify certain tensions. For instance, when discussing the production of professional identities in highly neoliberal contexts, educators are depicted at times in a quite victimised manner with scarce enough agency to overcome an overwhelmingly oppressive system. Not every author

emphasises this particular narrative though, as seen in Woodrow's (2008) claim that within a neoliberal environment not every subjective engagement with this environment constitutes subjugation. Similarly, teachers are often described as being oppressed or negatively affected by the maternalist discourses that circulate in the field, while research has arguably devoted more time to exploring how detrimental maternalism has been than to explore the possibilities it opens. There are notable exceptions to this, as seen in Chang-Kredl's (2015) work on maternal thinking and Ailwood's (2007) description of educators' relation to maternalist discourses as complex and ambivalent. As she states, not every educator rejects the possibility of a dual mother-teacher identity nor interprets it as undermining their professional status. As Chang-Kredl (2015) further adds, the rejection of the maternal may oppress women as well.

A similar example, at times enacted within the reconceptualist perspective, is the demonization of developmental and psychologizing approaches to EC education, which seems to have led to a point in which the reasons 'why we loathe them' have stopped being analysed at all. For instance, is it always the case that a child-centred pedagogy, famously endorsed by developmental perspectives, necessarily entails the postponement of the educator's own needs, as Chang-Kredl (2018, p. 267) seems to suggest?

As I hope to demonstrate in the following section, introducing the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious to the discussion on EC educator subjectivity may help free us, to some extent, from the above-discussed perils of prescriptiveness and oversimplification. Since experiences, emotions and ideas cannot be easily classified at an unconscious level in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, a psychoanalytic understanding of subjectivity may help us capture some of its ambivalences, paradoxes and contradictions.

2. Psychoanalytic research on teacher subjectivity

Psychoanalytically informed authors have carried out innovative research on teacher subjectivity, highlighting the productivity of exploring teachers' subjective experience and its production at the interface between individual agency and societal structure. This joint consideration, from a psychoanalytic perspective, of the social and psychic aspects of subject formation has been referred to as a psychosocial approach. It can be argued that this scholarship has opened the possibility to pose prolific questions about teacher subjectivity, showing through its research that teachers respond in complex

and unpredictable ways to the world that surrounds them, beyond the structural constraints of their context and circumstances. In this way, teachers seem to be given back the opportunity to give an account of their own subjectivation processes. A thorough introduction of the notion of the unconscious, arguably the most crucial contribution of this body of literature, acknowledges the complexity of these subject formation processes and their paradoxical relation to power, thus enabling the articulation of a richer, more layered account of them. Other related key concepts are desire, given its dual urge to both resist and obey normative aspects of the social order; and fantasy, which offers a productive means to explore otherwise obscure attachments to ideology and other discourses.

As Moore (2006) argues, the psychosocial project shares with similar sociological perspectives an interest in the way human beings enter the social world, starting from a pre-symbolic state of being. This shared concern can be exemplified by Bourdieu's notion of *field*, proposed by him, roughly, to conceptualise the pre-existing social world subjects are born into (Bourdieu 1990; in Moore 2006 p. 491). For Moore (2006) though, sociological accounts tend to focus on social and individual responses and experiences, without enquiring about the origin and motivations that underlie them. He further urges us to consider social actors' journeys through the socio-symbolic world, not only in terms of the navigation of the socio-economic order, but also as a journey into and a positioning within the psychic order concerned with the emergence of desire. In this way, both a joint focus and the breaking down of the semiotic boundaries between agency and structure become crucial (p. 501).

In what follows, I will briefly discuss Moore's (2006) research with practising teachers in which he explored teachers' ambivalent engagements with educational policies. While there are many policies that teachers may not feel completely comfortable with, they may ultimately accept and implement them as complex, paradoxical, strong unconscious desires seem to constantly be at play (p. 487). For Moore (2006), teachers' abilities to enact educational practices they do not adhere to can stem as much from a deliberate willingness to comply to legal requirements, as from internalised views of themselves as having scarce agency to negotiate them.

Moore further discusses the experiences and accounts of two of his research participants, Bill and Graeme. Bill's school had recently introduced the ability grouping of students and a mandatory use of school uniform. In spite of disagreeing with these two measures, Bill accepted them in what he described as a respect for democratically

reached decisions (p. 492). Moore et al. (2002; in Moore, 2006) characterised Bill's response as 'a consciously pragmatic orientation to (…) policy developments' underpinned, at the same time, by an unacknowledged need for personal approval. For Moore, following Billig (1997; in Moore, 2006), Bill's sustained discomfort with his ideological compromise may be understood as posing a neurotic conflict, often resolved by individuals 'through fantasies about the ideal self'. In Bill's case, the fantasy at play was an idealised self-image as a consistent democrat (p. 496). In sum, Bill seems to have subordinated his educational and political ideologies to a different set of feelings, a strong desire of not wanting to lose popularity by offending the emerging symbolic order of the school (p. 497).

Moore's other research participant, Graeme, had recently decided to leave the teaching profession, given his disappointment at the loss of 'the socialisation aspect [of education] (…) the preparation for life' (2006, p. 495). While Graeme acknowledged how his own schooling had an impact on his desire to become a teacher, when it came to his decision to leave teaching, he seemed to focus on the external clash between his preferred teaching style and the one he felt was being imposed on him, dismissing the 'inside' forces that may also have been at play. For instance, the fact that his devotion for his students may have constituted a means to expiate his own personal experience of a cruel schooling (p. 500), an expiation no longer possible given the newly introduced teaching constraints. In this way, Graeme's decision to leave the profession may be understood not as a simple inability to change, but as a response to a substantive threat to his teacher identity. For Moore, both cases exemplify how teachers must constantly negotiate their positioning between the practicalities of their work and the demands of their 'inner selves' (p. 501).

In terms of the experience of having taken part in Moore's research, participants deemed the dissemination of their thoughts and feelings to a wider audience to offer a valuable means to not feel isolated. Participants considered being listened to by an interested professional to constitute a major aid to reflection on their practice (p. 487); increasing their initially limited awareness of how earlier experiences affected their current experience of mandated policy and its implementations (p. 495). Moore (2006) closes his article asserting the centrality of individual desire, with its urge to both resist and obey, to the enactment of public policy, especially when it entails the imposition of a contrarian ideology (p. 497).

Clarke (2012, 2013), a fellow psychosocial author, explored teachers' paradoxical experience of high-stakes accountability educational systems from a Lacanian perspective. He poses the Lacanian notion of fantasy to account for the way teachers' may engage with oppressive and subjugating discourses and practices, being gripped by and deriving enjoyment from them in ways that go beyond their rational or symbolic content (Clarke, 2012 p. 179).

According to Clarke (2012), increasing competitiveness stimulated by over-assessment and intense auditing processes has undermined crucial aspects of teachers' professional identity turning them into a professional group no longer seen as capable of exercising autonomy and self-management (Olsen, 2010; in Clarke, 2012 p. 180). The loss of teacher agency has been replaced by discourses of teacher effectiveness that put teachers at the centre of educational debates while, in a technical and instrumental way, depoliticising and disconnecting them from the social aspects of teaching (Larsen, 2010; Taubman, 2009; in Clarke, 2012 p. 187). Clarke (2013) further states that teachers can be seduced by neoliberal policy technologies, deriving an enjoyment from them while simultaneously longing for an imagined, former or future, collaboration and collegiality (p. 234). Both the enjoyment of subjugating policies and the idealisation of professional collegiality constitute examples of fantasmatic (that is, fantasised) attachments to conflictive discourses.

Clarke and Moore (2013) have continued to jointly explore the neoliberal distrust of teacher professionalism seen in the advancement of accountability narratives, which are characterised by methodological reductionism, a persuasive rhetoric, and universalising pretensions (p. 488). Specifically, Clarke and Moore have analysed teacher professional standards and their reliance on universalised terms, such as 'teacher effectiveness', 'best practice', etc. These terms can be deemed to constitute, in psychoanalytic terms, 'a signifier[14] without a signified' (Fink, 2004, p. 84; in Clarke and Moore, 2013), whose very emptiness makes them ultimately impossible to achieve. The inherent impossibility of these standards is often concealed by phrasing them with the definite article; '*the* learning process', '*the* social context' (Clarke and Moore, 2013 p. 489), and by doing so suggesting they make reference to something tangible. In this way, Clarke and Moore (2013) emphasise the inevitable inadequacy of teacher professional standards that fail to capture the multidimensionality of teaching (p. 491).

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[14] A word that which does not have a univocal or fixed meaning, whose meaning (signified) changes referentially, depending on its relative position within discourse (Evans, 2006).

Teachers' experience the 'hegemonic hypernarrative' (Stronach, 2010, p. 10; in Clarke and Moore, 2013) of standards and accountability, characteristic of global neoliberal educational policies, as a reduction of spaces for the exercise of their critical symbolic agency. This may lead them, Clarke and Moore argue, to commit 'epistemic suicide' (Webb, 2012; in Clarke and Moore, 2013) or engage in a 'virtuous pragmatism', retreating from active confrontation (p. 494). In this way, teachers respond to the professional standards that colonise their practice, with 'resignation, compliance or cynicism' (p. 495).

Clarke and Moore's (2013) research specifically refuses limited understandings of teachers' identities, which define good teaching in terms of compliance to itemised professional standards. They make a call, instead, to acknowledge the singularity of each teacher's experience further highlighting the need to encourage teachers to transcend the stagnating effects of standardisation discourses, by legitimising desire and passion as crucial attributes of the singular in teaching (p. 498). As seen, a clear ethical stance underlies these researchers' positioning, further informing the political project of envisioning an agentic teaching profession.

While the above authors can be characterised as exploring the problem of teacher identity in a balanced way, in terms of their consideration of the psychic and social factors at play, authors like Deborah Britzman (1986, 2006, 2010, etc.), Tamara Bibby (2010, 2018, etc.) and Lisa Farley (2014) have addressed the subject focusing to a greater extent on the 'psycho' aspects of the psychosocial duality.

Britzman (1986), drawing on her experience in teacher education, has researched and written extensively about student teachers' production of their teacher identities at the interface of their biography and the social structure. In relation to this, she has pointed out the triple challenge that student teachers face when they return to classroom life. In order to learn how to educate others, and to learn about the teacher's world, student teachers must try to understand their own institutional biography; the fact they were also a schoolchild once. Teachers bring their forgotten infantile history and childhood conflicts into the classroom in a way that seems as if they had never left (Britzman 2009; in Britzman, 2010 p. 236). When teachers' institutional biography is left unexamined, Britzman adds, authoritarian teaching practices may be reproduced and naturalised (Britzman 1986, p. 443).

In her study with in-service student teachers, Britzman (1986) found three recurring, in her words, 'cultural myths' about the teaching profession that were often cited by her participants: the fact that everything depends on the teacher; that the teacher is the expert; and that teachers are self-made. From her perspective, these ideas are a reflection of the student teacher's isolation which entails an overwhelming burden of responsibility while, at the same time, the promise of individual power (p. 448). For Britzman, this individual understanding of the profession dismisses the fact that teaching takes place at the interface of complex social circumstances and within historicised social relations offering a simplistic account of how power operates in educational life (p. 453).

In her discussion of teacher illness, Britzman (2006) describes how the fear of failure is a prevalent source of anxiety among teachers. She makes a call to problematise the notion of teacher burnout, wondering what openings the use of a different vocabulary could bring about. For instance, drawing on Hassoun (1997; in Britzman, 2006), Britzman considers melancholia as a potentially productive way of characterising teachers' responses to the pressures of institutional life, often characterised by passivity or withdrawal (pp. 129-130). She also points out how, in the hope of keeping private conflicts at bay while teaching, teachers' depression is rarely spoken about; attention is focused instead on the students' learning difficulties or on idealised images of the teacher (p. 131). Britzman further explores, for instance, the meanings that teachers' headaches may have. They may appear when teachers feel they must be positive and upbeat for the sake of the students, or that they are responsible for offering impeccable role models, thus expressing their hatred of having to take on these roles, even when they do not feel well (p. 133). Drawing on Anna Freud, Britzman points out how having to take the position of a universal superego[15] may bring the illness on itself, reanimating teachers' own conflicts with authority and instilling the desire for an impossible success. Hence the importance of teachers' own analysis so that they may actively avoid projecting onto students their own superego anxieties (p. 136). Lastly, Britzman summarises some of the challenges of the formation of teacher identity: fears of failure and the pressure for perfection may elicit feelings of

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[15] Freud described the superego as one of the three substructures of personality (along with the id and the ego). It has a role of prohibition and criticism in relation to the ego, similar to that of a judge or a censor. Other functions of the superego include conscience, self-observation and the formation of ideals (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973).

fragmentation and of losing one's mind, all of which highlights the inextricably emotional character of teaching (p. 137).

As seen, psychoanalytic accounts of teacher identity formation perceptively show there is a complexity to teachers' response and experience of their circumstances that goes beyond mere subjugation. While sharing with other critical approaches the ethical aim of politicising teachers and supporting their resistance to hegemonic discourses, it can be argued this is done in a less prescriptive manner. The awareness and acknowledgement that the unconscious workings of fantasy and desire may cause teachers to exercise their agency in unpredictable ways render futile any attempt at advancing any particular subjectification 'agenda'.

3. Contribution of the thesis

In this chapter, I have reviewed the discussion and main debates on the challenges faced by the EC profession - concerning notions of quality, professionalism and care - and appraised the way in which critical perspectives on EC education have conceptualised these dilemmas.

While EC educators have historically been required to hold credentials and act professionally, they have not been offered the support nor the opportunities to exercise the professional autonomy that is demanded from them (Taggart, 2011). At the same time, it has been argued that the marked emotional and relational character of EC education demands distinctive understandings of professionalism (Warren, 2014; Page, 2017; etc.). EC educators have engaged with these and other tensions in ambivalent ways, for instance, complying with constraining discourses in order to legitimise their practice and embracing and disavowing the care dimension of the profession, among other contested aspects.

While the EC profession has been described as rather fragmented, given the structural disparities in status and professional background of its workforce, critical scholarship has pointed out how the forging of a strong collective identity, with a shared view on the struggles of the profession, may offer educators a means of emancipation and resistance (Osgood 2006; Chang-Kredl and Kingsley, 2014; etc.). A body of research has explored the collectivity that emerges from teacher groups, advocating for their effectiveness as teacher development tools (Gasoi et al., 2016; Kuh, 2016; Vrieling et al., 2016; etc.). However, in this context, teachers' reflexivity on their professional identities seems to have been largely instrumental in the strengthening of teaching skills.

Critical approaches have made epistemological contributions to the field. The Deleuzoguattarian perspective has pointed out the importance of paying attention to aspects that transcend language like the body and the material (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; MacNaughton, 2005; MacLure, 2013; etc.). As a whole, feminist, post-structuralist and reconceptualist perspectives have challenged hegemonic discourses on EC education offering fluid accounts of subjectivity, agency and power relations, and advancing an agenda concerned with denouncing inequality and the exploitation of the workforce and the empowerment of EC educators (Lenz-Taguchi, 2005; Dalli, Miller & Urban, 2012; etc.). However, although these ethico-political positionings are much needed by the field, they may entail the risk of oversimplifying and prescribing particular understandings and responses to the struggles of the profession. I have argued that this can be addressed by adopting a psychoanalytically-informed psychosocial perspective that introduces the notion of an unconscious which may help problematise these potentially reductionist understandings by acknowledging the singularity and unpredictability of teachers' unconscious experiences and responses to the world in which they practise.

This thesis is positioned within the abovementioned field of psychosocial studies, aiming to put the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious to work in a piece of research on the production of EC educator subjectivities in the current Chilean societal context. I argue that the unconscious, as an analytic tool, may allow me to explore educators' professional subjectivation processes in an innovative and distinctive manner, problematising some of the normative discourses that have at times hegemonised canonical discussions in the field.

While the study of teacher subjectivity has been addressed from psychoanalytic perspectives (Moore, 2006; Clarke, 2013; etc.), there does not seem to be a significant amount of literature drawing on psychoanalytically informed empirical research conducted with teachers, let alone with EC educators. In this context, my research precisely contributes with a psychoanalytically informed empirical exploration of the way EC educators produce their accounts of their professional subjectivities. In order to stimulate the production of these accounts I utilise a free-associative method especially devised to discern unconscious aspects of discourse. This methodological choice echoes the psychosocial aim of keeping close to participants' discourse to give them the greater role in the articulation of their subjective experiences. While this can be considered a shared aim with other qualitative research approaches, sometimes termed 'giving voice', what is distinctive about free-association is that, in its tracing of

transitory elements of discourse, it can fleetingly reveal some of its ambivalent, paradoxical and contradictory aspects. In this sense, free association does not so much encourage participants to produce coherent accounts of their subjective experience as it invites them to disrupt their own narratives and in doing so, opens a new space for the expression of subjectivity.

Likewise, the study of teacher groups has opened interesting avenues, suggesting the productivity of exploring that which may take place between 'the workforce' and 'the subject' (Nieto, 2003; McCotter, 2001; etc.). However, this has been done in an instrumental manner - mostly with the purpose of boosting teacher effectiveness - and often exhibiting narrow understandings of group dynamics. Concurrently, there is a rich experience of psychoanalytically-informed groups (Aviv, 2010; Levin, 2017; Van Roy et al., 2017; etc.) which has succeeded in producing complex accounts of what transpires in groups and the possibilities groups may offer for subjective expression. I argue that transposing a psychoanalytically-informed understanding of groups to the consideration of groups of teachers may open novel possibilities, both in terms of what can be done with teacher groups and the extent to which these groups may shed light on the production of teacher subjectivity.

Lastly, in terms of how this thesis represents a contribution to the Chilean case, I argue that a psychoanalytic perspective offers an especially relevant tool to make sense of the very particular conditions of production of teacher subjectivity in the current Chilean context, characterised by an unprecedented social mobilisation. As discussed in the introduction to the thesis, Chilean EC educators seem currently to be enacting subtle yet powerful shifts in their social positioning, inserting themselves in the policy debate and resisting mandates that they deem to compromise their professional values. While there is some indication that these subjective shifts have been perceived by Chilean society - especially the government - as somewhat destabilising, it is not completely clear what is so transformative or even upsetting about EC educators' subjective expressions. In this scenario, an awareness and acknowledgement of the unconscious aspects that underlie the formation of professional subjectivities may help grasp some of these otherwise hidden dynamics and motives.

In sum, this thesis will provide a new dimension in the conceptualisation of EC educators' professional subjectivities and their positioning in the social context in which they practise, highlighting the overdetermined complexity of their roles.

Therefore, my main research question is: How do EC educators produce their professional subjectivities in the current Chilean context?

CHAPTER 3

Theoretical framework

Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapters, my research explores the production of early childhood (EC) educator subjectivities in the context of the current Chilean socio-political landscape. Central to my understanding of subjectivation is the idea that subjectivity emerges in the relation to the Other. I understand the (capitalised) Other in the Lacanian sense, as 'both another subject, in his radical alterity and unassimilable uniqueness, and also the symbolic order [the realm of the signifier] which mediates the relationship with that other subject.' (Evans, 2006 p. 136). Given the marked relational character of EC practice, this perspective presents itself as especially applicable to my exploration of EC educators' accounts of how they subjectify themselves in relation to diverse others encountered in their professional lives. In relation to this, the group modality of my data production offered a direct way to observe some of these relational dynamics.

My main data production method was free-associative group interviews, a method that aims at exploring unconscious aspects of subjectivity. In this chapter, I discuss three conceptual aspects that underlie this methodological decision: first, the productivity of conceptualising subjectivity in terms of the unconscious and what it means to explore these unconscious aspects; secondly, how free association allows us to conduct this exploration and why it is considered particularly helpful in revealing the unconscious; and lastly, what groups can bring to the implementation of free association and how working with groups is different from working with individuals.

This chapter therefore has three main arguments. First, I argue that a psychoanalytically informed consideration of the unconscious may tackle something that is missing from other accounts of subjectivity. Secondly, I posit that free association is a fruitful methodological tool for exploring the unconscious; its distinctive aim, to destabilise discursive coherence in order to unveil some of what is unknown to the subject about themselves, is at the core of its productivity as a research method distinguishing it from other approaches to qualitative research. Lastly, I contend that working with groups is particularly useful to my research as it offers an innovative instance with which to explore the emergence of free association and the overall production of accounts of subjectivity.

1. The case for the unconscious

As the main rationale behind my methodological standpoint, I argue that a consideration of the unconscious dimensions of discourse may offer tools to produce a textured account of subjectivity allowing the exploration of crucial aspects of subject formation arguably neglected by other perspectives.

As discussed in the literature review, EC educators negotiate their professional identities through complex engagements with circulating discourses on EC education. Namely (and among several other contested narratives), hegemonic discourses on children's agency and development, notions of what constitutes 'proper' EC pedagogy, the tensions between care and education, and the question of what professionalism looks like in EC education. EC educators respond to these discourses in different ways at different times, resisting and challenging them or reproducing and adhering to them. In other words, EC educators experience and respond to their contexts and circumstances, by exercising their agency in ways that transcend simple subjugation to its constraints. In this sense, layered views of subjectivity are much needed and relevant for understandings of the complexity of EC education professional subjectivity.

From a sociological standpoint, subjectivity has often been theorised as taking place at the interface between individual agency and social structure. It is seen as a possibility for lived experience within a contingent historical and political context (Heyes, 2010) which is discursively shaped in tension with power and knowledge (Phillips, 2011). Yet it can be argued that producing accounts in these terms often leaves something missing; there is not an available interpretive framework to make sense, among other things, of apparently inexplicable desires and motivations. As mentioned above, agency is not always deployed in an orderly, predictable manner, as can be seen in our ambivalent relations to hegemonic discourses. According to Newman (2007), the Foucauldian account of this relation - which broadly explains it in terms of reproduction/compliance and resistance - lacks an interpretive level; an absence that might be remedied by adding further a layer of complexity:

> What is missing (...) is some sort of account of the unconscious processes and 'irrational drives' which both bind us to power and cause us to try and free ourselves from it (...) what is needed is some notion of the psyche – understood as different to the subject and as forming the unpredictable underside of subjectifying power (p. 76).

From this perspective, the psyche - that is, the unconscious - may offer the opportunity to explore that which is beyond the dichotomy between agency and structure, constituting an instance that traverses both spheres. This offers an opening for interpretive frameworks like psychoanalysis to inform and contribute to a richer understanding of subjectivity.

According to Layton (2008), the question about subjectivity has often been formulated as 'what divides the subject?' From a psychoanalytic standpoint, the exploration of this question largely relies on how the relation between self and other is conceptualised, as for most psychoanalytic perspectives it is the encounter with Otherness - whether conceptualised as social structure, language, and/or as *an-other* - which divides the subject. In most psychoanalytic theories, Layton adds, this encounter between the subject and otherness has been characterised as antagonistic as it reveals a tension between subjectivation and subjection, understanding the latter as the emergence and situatedness of subjectivity in the social. For Layton then, the conceptual challenge lies in acknowledging that subjectivity emerges within power structures without reducing its understanding to social determinism (p. 61).

For Butler (1997) the antagonism inherent to subjectivation - what she calls subjection - can also be described as paradoxical, as becoming a subject necessarily entails becoming, at the same time, subjected. The paradox lies in the fact that the autonomy involved in becoming a subject can only arise from becoming subjected to a certain power, which entails 'a radical dependency' (p. 83). Drawing on Foucault, Butler (1997) describes subjection as the making of a subject, which is not simply the domination nor the production of the subject, but a certain restriction in its production, a restriction indispensable for this production to take place (p. 84). Two further critical aspects of the Foucauldian perspective on subjection are that subjects are not produced in one moment, nor in totality. Instead, the subject emerges in the process of being repeatedly produced; the notion of repetition becomes important here in that this constant production is not the same as constantly being produced anew (p. 93). For Butler, this dependency on repetition, that is, the necessity for subjects to constantly reiterate or rearticulate themselves so to remain a subject, would be an indication of their incoherence and incompleteness (p. 99). Still aided by a Foucauldian vocabulary Butler describes how subjects, in their incoherence and incompleteness, are all the same demanded by normative discourses to produce an identity. These discourses enforce totalising regulatory principles whose totalising effects are what imposes on subjects the development of a coherent *identity* (pp. 85-86, emphasis in

original). However, Butler claims that identity can never be totalised; it is always contested, it appears as a disorder thus, in this sense, subjects are by definition undone (pp. 96-97). For Rose (1987; in Butler, 1997), this failure unveils the absence of continuity in psychic life, a life which resists identity at its very core (p. 97).

Bringing the notion of the unconscious to the consideration of subjection, Butler (1997) states that the opportunity to resist these normative demands has an unconscious character, that is, it lies in the psyche. In this sense the psyche - described by Butler, as something other than the subject - is that which exceeds subjects' imprisoning experience of discourses (p. 86). Yet at the same time, she asserts, we do develop unconscious attachments to subjection. In this sense, the unconscious is not necessarily freer than the subject (p. 88). Drawing on Freud, Butler expands on this adding that some of these unconscious attachments may precede and even condition subjectivation, often consisting in an attachment to prohibition, which is critical - among other aspects - to the formation of the conscious[16] (as opposed to the unconscious). Very briefly, the conscious can be defined as that which allows subjects to have a certain awareness about themselves. This formation will be later indispensable for the emerging subject to develop reflexivity, also a subjectifying function (pp. 102-103). Layton (2008) seems to agree with this perspective stating that unconscious conflict is by no means produced solely by an oppressive experience of external discourses as the subject is also already affected/divided by loss, confusion, blocked desires, among many other unconscious experiences (p. 67). This understanding of the unconscious and its interplay with normative discourses might raise productive questions about how the professional subjectivities of EC educators emerge, helping to give a complex account of educators' subjections to both regulatory discourses (concerning, for instance, the notion of professionalism) and their own unconscious attachments.

The observation that there are ungraspable, not easily discernible aspects at play in the production of teachers' subjective experiences has also been made beyond psychoanalytic accounts of subjectivity without necessarily utilising the notion of unconscious. An example of this can be found in Ball's (2003) exploration of the expression of teacher subjectivity in the high-stakes accountability educational system. According to Ball, teachers' fabrication of performative responses to surveillance leaves a 'surplus of meaning' that spills over into the everyday life of their professional

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[16] While from now on I use the term *'the conscious'*, it bears noting that Butler seems to use *'the conscious', 'conscience'* and *'consciousness'* indistinctively in her discussion.

environments. Here Ball seems to conceive this surplus of meaning as an elusive leftover of teachers' subjective experiences, elusive in the sense of not being able to be fully articulated. Ball further describes how this surplus tinges teachers' relations to their profession with ambivalence since the abovementioned fabrications of performativity entail both resistance and capitulation (p. 225).

The idea of a remainder that exceeds articulation may suggest something of the order of the unconscious, whose consideration can potentially enrich the exploration of our performative engagements with discourses, shedding some light on the motivations that make us resist and/or comply with them. Psychosocial studies have embraced this project. While most approaches within the field are especially concerned with acknowledging the irreducibility of the psycho to the socio and vice versa, authors like Hoggett (2004) have attempted to do this by preserving the hyphen in *psycho-social*, signalling the disjunction between the former and the latter, between psychoanalysis and the political. Conversely, Frosh and Baraitser (2008) have chosen to dispense with the hyphen, proposing instead to depict the psychosocial as a Möbius band[17]. This image offers a metaphor for the inexorable interconnectedness between the psycho and the social; a metaphor also utilised by Clarke (2013). The endlessness of the Möbius strip, and the associated view of the unconscious as psychosocial, resonates with a Lacanian understanding of the unconscious as that which is spilt everywhere, as opposed to a notion of inner and outer psychic life. In sum, the absence of the hyphen may be understood as signalling that both dimensions, while different, are never experienced as separate, since the divide between the psycho and the social is only possible - and relevant - to identify in terms of the lenses from which the psychosocial is considered.

Drawing on the above, I will understand the unconscious as that which may allow me to produce an account of ambivalent, unpredictable, (in appearance) unexplainable aspects of subjectivity. Some of these aspects are the paradoxical character of subject formation, as seen in its simultaneous emergence of autonomy and subjection to power; the incompleteness, incoherence and concomitant repetition of this process; and the impossibility to respond to the demand of normative discourses to develop an identity. In this state of things, the unconscious can be defined as that which exceeds

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[17] According to the English Oxford Dictionary (EOD), a Möbius strip is a surface with one continuous side formed by joining the ends of a rectangle after twisting one end through 180°. While it appears to have two sides, it only has one side and one edge.

the subjects' experience of subjugation, yet at the same time determines the development of attachments to subjection both to aspects of the self and to others. This framework seems especially suited to formulating productive questions relevant to my exploration of EC educators' subjectivities:

- What are my research participants' experiences of normative EC discourses (on accountability, educational quality, the pressure for schoolification, among many others)?
- What is the role of their unconscious attachments in their engagement with these discourses?
- And, how do the educators' unconscious investments in EC practice permeate both their experience and discourse on their own practice?

Given that unconscious aspects are particularly difficult to grasp, it is necessary to find alternative methods to discern them beyond ordinary articulation. It is for this reason that I turn to the use of free association which I address in the following section.

2. Free association: researching the unconscious

In the previous section I have argued that the unconscious offers a productive framework to conceptualise subjectivity. Here, I make an argument about why free association was developed as a tool for exploring the unconscious and why it can be particularly useful in psychosocial research. Specifically, I contend that both the unconscious and free association relate to a conception of the Other making it an especially suitable technique for glimpsing the unconscious experience of otherness intrinsic to subjectivation. In what follows, I review the Freudian origins of free association and briefly consider some contemporary takes on the notion, with a focus on how the relation to the other is understood and what it is claimed it can be known about the Other through this relation.

Preliminary indications of the technique of free association can be found as early as 1893, as a corollary of Sigmund Freud's first explorations of hysteria; a condition whose observation allowed him to start delineating what would later constitute the psychoanalytic method. Free association had a particularly important role, defining the transition from the use of hypnotic and suggestion techniques to the psychoanalytic treatment as it is nowadays known (Moore and Fine, 1990).

Freud[18] understood hysteria as a psychic illness in which the connection between an idea (most frequently of traumatic nature) and its associated affect is lost. This dissociation was seen as a result of the use of the mechanism of repression, by which unbearable psychic contents are removed from consciousness and continue to exist only in the unconscious (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973). As Freud (1894) continues to explain, 'the incompatible idea [will] be rendered innocuous by its [affect] being transformed into something somatic' (p. 49). In this way, the detached affect will often seek expression through the mechanism of conversion by creating a conversive symptom, frequently a motor or sensorial alteration with a symbolic function (for example, the temporary loss of hearing because of 'not wanting to hear' a painful truth). In terms of the aetiology of hysteria, Freud and Breuer (1893) thought that traumatic events were not intrinsically pathogenic; only becoming pathological if the patient's affective response did not consist in a proportionate emotional reaction to what they had experienced. This view of hysteria informed their coined notion of *abreaction*, the discharge through speech of unbound affect whose successful result is a catharsis, which led them to advance their preanalytical 'cathartic method' (Auchincloss and Samberg, 2012) drawing on the observation that 'language serves as a substitute for action' (Breuer and Freud, 1893 p. 8).

The cathartic method was first implemented by means of hypnosis under which patients were prompted to reproduce the event that had originated the hysterical symptom. As a result of this procedure, often accompanied by the instruction to the patient to stop engaging in the symptom (e.g., to stop 'limping', or 'coughing'), Freud (1895) systematically found that the hysterical symptoms disappeared (p. 46). The suggestive element of the procedure, the request to the patient to stop repeating their symptom, was promptly dismissed in favour of the expressive aspect; remembering and articulating the traumatic event. Freud (1912) later described suggestion as a technique that, while often successful in alleviating symptoms, 'achieves nothing towards the uncovering of what is unconscious to the patient' (p. 118). However, it was as a result of his experience with suggestion that Freud developed the free associative technique.

The technique was operationalised through the 'fundamental rule of psychoanalysis' (Freud, 1912, 1938): asking the patient to say everything that occurs to them without self-censorship, and to avoid selecting the material they communicate, even if it is

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[18] Along with Josef Breuer, with whom he co-authored 'Studies on hysteria' (1893-1895).

something that is unpleasant to tell, or they deem it disagreeable, unimportant or nonsensical. Freud (1913a) uses an imagery depiction to exemplify the kind of speech he expects the patients to produce, 'Act as though (…) you were a traveller sitting next to the window of a railway carriage and describing to someone inside the carriage the changing views which you see outside' (p. 135).

The premise that underlies the fundamental rule is that the ideas conveyed by the patient will always relate to their psychic conflict and repressed unconscious material, and that these ideas will always be somehow associated to each other. This suggests a psychic determinism, a 'strict belief in the determination of mental life' (Freud, 1910 p. 38). Specifically, Freud considered the ideas that emerged 'an allusion to the repressed element, (…) a representation of it in indirect speech' (p. 30), ultimately constituting 'direct derivatives' of the unconscious (1938 p. 174).

When requesting his patients to observe the fundamental rule Freud did not ask them to *free-associate* nor to speak their *ideas*, rather asking them to communicate their 'Einfall', literally, what *falls* into their mind. As Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) assert, 'Einfall' should be distinguished from the term 'Assoziation', as the latter already suggests the configuration of a chain of associations. In absence of a satisfactory English translation, the suggestion to translate 'Einfall' to free association may have been perceived as coming from Freud himself, as he in fact sometimes used the German 'Freie Assoziation' as a synonym for the term (Freud 1916-1917 p. 47). What is productive about this precision is the acknowledgement that the associative links that underlie the patient's *Einfall*, as expressed during the analytic session, will for the most part go unnoticed, especially around its first utterance. Regarding this, Freud (1912) crucially states from the analyst's perspective that '(…) the things one hears are for the most part things whose meaning is only recognized later on' (p. 112); thus introducing the notion of deferred meaning. Lastly, Freud points out that the patient is not *free* when producing their discourse - the exact opposite is in fact true - as they must constantly actively struggle to counteract the 'irresistible temptation' to select and censor the emerged contents (1913a p. 135).

In spite of how challenging the above might be for patients, Freud observed in his preliminary experiences with free association that they seemed to be amenable to the method. This is exemplified in his description of a patient: 'it is as though she had adopted my procedure [saying everything that came to mind] and was making use of our conversation, apparently unconstrained and guided by chance' (1893 p. 56). He also derived the importance of not interrupting the patient with untimely questions or

interpretations, 'I was not to keep on asking her where this and that came from, but to let her tell me what she had to say' (p. 63); and the fruitless slowing effect of asking the patient straight away about their symptoms, recommending instead to 'allow them to quietly and steadily follow back the thread of [their] memories (...)' (1895 p. 35).

Further elaborating on the role of the analyst in the production of free association, Freud (1912) stated - in accordance with his abandonment of suggestion - that the doctor must forgo his own censorship and selection of the patient's material, keeping his memory unoccupied and ready to make associations. In order to achieve this the analyst must listen to the patient without directing his attention to anything in particular, maintaining instead an 'evenly-suspended attention'. Freud further stated that failing to implement this mode of attention would plainly waste the advantage derived from the patients' obeyance to the 'fundamental rule' (pp. 111-112). The rationale behind the technique is the avoidance of 'a danger inseparable from the exercise of deliberate attention': the selection from the patient's material in accordance with the analyst's expectations and inclinations, fixing some content in his mind while disregarding others. By following his expectations, the analyst risks 'never finding anything but what he already knows'. Ultimately, Freud counsels the analyst to 'simply listen, not [bothering] about whether he is keeping anything in mind' (p. 112).

Drawing on his view that 'everyone possesses in his own unconscious an instrument with which he can interpret the utterances of the unconscious in other people' (1913b p. 320), Freud understood the analyst's reception of the patient's free-associative discourse as an instance of unconscious communication. Accordingly, he advised the analyst to 'withhold all conscious influences from his [attention], giving himself completely to his "unconscious memory"' (1912 p. 112), in order to recognise the patient's concealed unconscious material. Further emphasising the idea of unconscious communication, Freud called on analysts to 'turn [their] own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient', affirming that by doing so the analyst's unconscious will be able to reconstruct the unconscious of the patient, which 'has determined [their] free associations' (pp. 115-116).

In terms of how to make sense of the patient's material when implementing this mode of listening, Freud asserts that the contents which already form some sort of connection will be available in the analyst's conscious while the rest of the contents, 'unconnected and in chaotic disorder', in spite of seeming submerged will always be ready to be recollected the instant the patient mentions something new to which they could be related (p. 112). It is for this reason - in agreement with the notions of psychic

determinism and deferred meaning - that everything the patient says, however disconnected it might appear to be from other contents, is taken seriously as a clue to the meaning of the patient's speech.

Freud described the analysis of free-associative discourse as a 'technical method of discovering the unconscious' that could be equally applied to the interpretation of patients' associations in analysis; their dreams; and their parapraxes[19]. Of these three procedures, Freud gave the most importance to the analysis of dreams, 'the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious' (1910 p. 33), thus most of his examples of analysing unconscious contents consist in dream interpretations.

Freud (1916-1917) describes a patient's dream where *several members of his family were sitting round a table of a peculiar shape.* It first occurred to the patient that he had seen a table of that kind when he visited a particular family. It came to his mind, then, that 'there was a peculiar relationship between the father and the son in this family' and, lastly, that this was also true of his relationship with his father. Here, the table had the unconscious function of pointing out this parallel (p. 119). Another patient dreamt that *she was at the theatre with her husband; half of the stalls were empty; and Elise, a newly-engaged friend of her same age, wanted to go too*. The empty stalls alluded to a real recent event, when the patient had bought tickets to a play so early that she had to pay a booking fee, only to find out she could have bought them the day of the play as the theatre was half empty. It occurred to the patient, in connection to her dream and its precipitating cause, that 'it was absurd of [her] to be in such a hurry to get married', especially after seeing Elise had gotten an 'excellent husband' many years later. As seen, in this case attending to the play offered a substitute for getting married (p. 122). In both examples, the patients' associations to an apparently mundane element of their dream revealed meaningful unconscious thoughts about their relationships.

Free association remains, to this day, the crux of psychoanalytic practice and has continued to be conceptualised from different psychoanalytic perspectives. A Lacanian understanding of free association that is relevant to my research considers it a means to glimpse what is new, different and unknown about the patient's unconscious, whose otherness is enigmatic to both the patient and the analyst (Fink, 2011). The presence of the analyst is considered crucial to the emergence of free association; the addressal of

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[19] Small faulty and haphazard actions like forgetting known things, slips of the tongue and the pen, and losing or breaking objects, among others; frequently performed by 'both normal and neurotic people', and to which scarce attention is usually paid (Freud 1910 p. 37).

an-other makes patent to the patient the ambiguity of their discourse, and the listening of the analyst can show them what is surprising, ambivalent or contradictory about it (Fink, 2007). From this perspective, free-associative discourse, in its ambiguity, is not seen as connected to specific meanings in a fixed way yet glimpses of meaning can be discerned - similarly to the Freudian stance - in a deferred manner (Makise, 2013). In their Lacanian-informed research, Lapping and Glynos (2019) have conceptualised the practice of free association interviews as an instance of transference[20], whose emergence is the necessary condition for the production of unconscious speech. They further understand the research transferential relationship as enabling an active space of unknowing in which free-associative discourse, in its otherness, is experienced as surprising by both the researcher and the participant.

Contrarily to the above, a Kleinian approach claims it is possible to achieve some certainty about the unconscious; as seen in Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) use of free association in their research, as a means to *secure* access to the emotional motivations and mechanisms participants use to defend themselves from anxiety (p. 11). Accordingly, the researcher-participant relationship is seen as an exchange between two defended subjects, in which the researcher's countertransferential[21] response to participants offers valuable information about their defence mechanisms.

Drawing on this review of free association, I will understand it as a mode of unconscious communication between subjects that may allow the exploration of the otherness of unconscious life, and therefore of subjectivity. The technique supposes both a mode of listening that considers every comment an indication of the subject's unconscious; and the subject's willingness to overcome the resistances that may compromise their flow of associations in their address of the other. This raises interesting questions for my research:

- In which ways might the clinical ethos of free association help produce glimpses of the unconscious aspects of the educators' professional subjectivities?
- Given the crucial role of the o/Other, as an engaged listener, in the production of free-associative discourse, how may this role be affected by the group

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[20] A constitutive attribute of intra/intersubjective unconscious relations, which entails the reedition of early intersubjective encounters. A fundamental dimension of the human being (Laplanche, 1999).

[21] Hollway and Jefferson (2013) describe countertransference as the therapist's response to the patients' transferences, as well as their own transferring of significant relationships onto them.

context; who would be the o/Other to whom the educators address themselves in the free-associative interviews?

The following review of psychoanalytic conceptualisations of groups will allow me to pose further questions regarding the group dimension of my project.

3. Groups

Having addressed (with a focus on its clinical origins) how free association can allow us to discern some of the unconscious aspects of subjectivity; in this section I argue that groups offer a productive space to work with free association that highlights the inherently relational character of subjectivation. Specifically, I posit that groups have an unconscious dimension and that the Other, in relation to which free-associative discourse is produced, seems to be located elsewhere than its place in a one to one encounter. Accordingly, the free association and overall unconscious activity that emerges from groups, while sharing crucial aspects, is not exactly the same as the one that emerges in a dyadic relation. In what follows, I provide a brief review of relevant psychoanalytic theorisations of groups, as I will further conceptualise and apply notions of group theory in the analysis chapters.

Groups constitute a specific type of intersubjectivity - understood as the dialectic encounter between subjectivities - in which not only relationships between subjects take place but also, and arguably more importantly, a relationship between each group member and the group as a whole is also established. When looking at groups from a psychoanalytic perspective, perhaps the most fundamental premise is that groups have an unconscious dimension (Foulkes, 1946; Bion, 1961; Gordon, 1991; etc.).

It has been argued that groups tend to emerge spontaneously as a product of the mere co-presence of subjects (that is, of group members), understanding this emergence as the development of subjects' prompt capacity to establish a deep engagement with the group. Furthermore, it has been described that in groups where there is an analyst or conductor, the experience of group members of being observed can intensify the intersubjectivity that is created among them (Gordon, 1991). The facilitating role of the group conductor resonates with the previous observation regarding the need for *an-other* for free-associative discourse to emerge, potentially suggesting a synergetic effect between the free association method and a group format. Given the abovementioned intensified interactions that often take place in groups, potent

62

unconscious dynamics like transference[22] and more specific unconscious mechanisms like projective identification (which I will discuss in more detail later in the thesis) can appear and disappear ubiquitously in the group encounter (Arcari, 2003).

Groups have been described as a form of unconscious communication (Foulkes, 1946; Bion, 1961; Gordon, 1991; Pines, 1996; Arcari, 2003; Aviv, 2010; Szykierski, 2014; etc.) through which individuals who engage in it are drawn out of themselves; that is, are decentred from the subjective position from which they normally narrate themselves. This may allow subjects to discover in the group experience something they did not know about themselves (Gordon, 1991). According to Rogers (1987), groups create a particularly affectively-laden context in which group communication can become prolific. The emergence of potentially intense defence mechanisms[23] must be managed in a very balanced way to give space to their expression - to seize their communicative potential - without encouraging group members to simply act them out[24]. A group that succeeds in doing this will be able to move quite easily in and out of the transference relationships enacted within the group; that is, its members will be able to both engage in the intensity of the transference and take distance from it developing the capacity to learn from the relation and bring about insight (p. 105).

Introducing a vocabulary of the unconscious, Arcari (2003) proposes the notion of the *unconscious setting of the group*, to describe the emotional field that allows a specific type of mental life to emerge as a product of a group process, one qualitatively different from that enabled by a two-person setting. Drawing on Matte-Blanco's (1975) work, Arcari poses that group communication oscillates between the levels of the conscious and the unconscious mind. In other terms, correspondingly, between asymmetrical and symmetrical thinking[25]. While asymmetry alludes to the non-reversible logical relations that underlie common sense, symmetrical thinking describes how the unconscious deals with the relation between elements, in such a way that the inverse relationship of any relationship is seen as identical to the relationship itself (Ginzburg,

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[22] As previously outlined, it refers to the transference of unconscious contents -such as memories and previous relationships- from one context to the present intersubjective encounter (Laplanche, 1999).

[23] For example, the projection of negative or unwanted aspects of the self onto other group members; or the attempt to control their minds to create an illusion of sameness; as a response -for instance- to experiencing the relation with them as persecutory.

[24] Expressing repressed or unconscious feelings in overt behaviour.

[25] The notions of symmetrical and asymmetrical thinking were first proposed by the Chilean psychoanalyst Ignacio Matte-Blanco (1975), as part of his Bi-logic model. Within this model, both modes of thinking operate simultaneously and often participate in the same mental processes.

2007). In this state of things, the differences between the elements that are represented tend to be abolished, as well as (notably) the distinction between representations and their associated emotions (Thanopulos, 2009). As seen, Matte-Blanco's notion of symmetry expands Freud's description of the free, non-hierarchized, indistinguishable way in which thoughts relate to each other in the unconscious[26] (Shaw, 2014). As I mention below, the coexistence of a conscious and unconscious level of functioning is considered a distinctive attribute of clinically-oriented group processes.

The exchange of thoughts and words between group members can give birth to a shared discourse. This discourse is not always the product of a balanced co-construction, thus entailing at times for some participants, an obedience to the group or to the points of view of one or more members (Aviv, 2010). Nevertheless, as Gordon (1991) points out, the intersubjectivity that emerges in groups does not constitute the group members' entire experience of the group encounter. Many times subjects become aware of being separated from the group, as seen in their struggle to join the other members of the group or, even more so, in the development of feelings of isolation. At the same time, participants' engagement with groups does not always necessarily involve a complete submersion in it as groups also offer individuals the opportunity to display their personal characteristics in a dynamic, ever shifting scene (Foulkes, 1946). In sum, the group mediates participants' engagement with their own and others' discourses when they exchange their opinions in the group context.

The dialogue that takes place in the group setting has been named *free-floating discussion* (Foulkes, 1948), constituting - in simplified terms - the group's 'counterpart' of free-associative discourse. However, as Rogers (1987) asserts, free-floating discussion is not exactly the same as the free association that takes place in an individual analysis, in which subjects use the latter to think mostly about themselves. In free-floating discussion instead, participants of clinically-oriented groups also use free association to think about what is going on in the group, and the fact of having to communicate their associations to the other group members, can make it a more thoughtful process (p. 105). In this sense, taking part in a free-floating discussion demands a higher degree of conscious mediation than the simple articulation of one's individual free-associative discourse. In addition, the above discussed role of being the addressee of free association - free-floating discussion in this case - is undertaken not

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[26] The unconscious is characterised by the absence of time, negation, and mutual contradiction, as well as by the extensive use of the mechanisms of displacement and condensation (Freud, 1915).

exclusively by the group conductor but also, crucially, by the group members themselves. There is a richness and complexity to free-floating discussion in that, as Levin (2017) points out, it is not only informed by the group members' associations but also by their associations to the associations of other group members. At the same time, the emergence of free-floating discussion is challenging in that it demands putting into words contents that may have been disowned by intense defence mechanisms (Foulkes 1948; in Rogers, 1987 p. 104); yet, when this is achieved, it can help group participants to gain more access to their emotional world (Berman, 2012; in Doron and Warhaftig-Aran, 2018 p. 139).

In the context of my project, I utilise two related psychoanalytic concepts: the mechanism of projective identification and the notion of thirdness, to enrich the conceptualisation of my data and further inform my understanding of how groups work. I address these briefly here as I will expand on them in detail in the analysis chapters. Projective identification - first described by Melanie Klein - consists in an omnipotent unconscious fantasy that affects the relationships between subjects; individuals project the undesired aspects of their self onto the other in order (among other purposes) to dominate the other's mind, or to take over the other's capacities (Lapping, 2011). It has been argued that the use of projective identification entails a subjective change for both the projector and the recipient, given its underlying negation of the boundaries between both subjectivities (Ogden, 2004). As previously mentioned, participating in a group can particularly stimulate the use of projective identification as an unconscious form of group communication (Bion 1961, in Szykierski 2014). In this way, projective identification may offer a useful tool to conceptualise the way affect emerges in association with contents and circulates within the group's discourse.

Similarly, as suggested above, it has been important for group theorists to stress that group intersubjectivity, of necessity, arises from more than two subjectivities. In order to further understand this, the conceptualisation of intersubjectivity as thirdness may be useful. While the notion of thirdness was first used to describe - from a psychoanalytic perspective - what emerges from the dialectic encounter between the analyst and the analysand (Ogden, 1994), it was later expanded to make sense of other type of intersubjective encounters. For instance, the concept of thirdness has informed the group theory notion of analytic field, first described as the engagement of two persons - in a group context - in a shared psychodynamic process, whose counterparts cannot be conceived without reference to the other (Rigas, 2012; Bernardi, 2017).

These understandings may allow the introduction of subtle distinctions between the form thirdness takes in dyads - where the concept was first explored - and in groups, thereby enabling comments about group functioning.

In light of this review, I will understand the free-floating discussion that emerges in groups - just like the free association that emerges in a dyadic context - to be a mode of unconscious communication that requires a special engagement among its participants and in which the role of the Other is indispensable. I will further assume that this kind of discussion can potentially produce glimpses of unconscious aspects of subjectivity. Conversely, what is distinctive about group free association is that an intensified affect may emerge as a result of the intensified intersubjectivity of groups; that the place of the Other seems to circulate within the group; and that subjects can free-associate to the other group members' free associations.

My joint use of a free-associative method and a group modality in my research with educators opens productive questions, both about the type of discourse that can be produced and its mode of production. While my project is largely clinically-informed, it is not clinical in its purpose nor in its mode of implementation (as I explain in detail in the methodology and analysis chapters). Thus, it will be particularly interesting to explore the potentially different ways in which the free association group interviews will be enacted:

- Will the group context disrupt, or maybe stimulate the emergence of the educators' free-associative discourse? Will it assist its destabilisation or, contrarily, will it insist towards the creation of coherence?
- Will the educators develop an interest in the group for itself, in a similar way to what takes place in clinically-oriented groups? To what extent might they seem to engage in this kind of reflection on the group process?

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed why the unconscious is a productive notion for conceptualising subjectivity, why free association is a good method for researching the unconscious, and how working with free association in groups can be justified.

I have argued that the unconscious is that which may allow the discernment of (apparently) inexplicable aspects of subjectivity that are at play both in subjects' engagement with circulating discourses and in the formation of their subjectivities. This understanding of the unconscious allowed me to raise questions about the

production of the professional subjectivities of my participants as EC educators in their engagement with the professional discourses that permeate their practice.

I have also made an argument about how the conditions of production of free association crucially determine its success as a mode of unconscious communication. Namely, free-associative discourse must always be uttered in addressal to *an-other*; and the receiver of free-associative discourse (whether analyst or researcher) must listen to it from their unconscious, without chasing themes nor aiming to find specific meanings and taking every comment as an indication of the subject's unconscious. As seen in my brief exploration of contemporary understandings of free association, while a Kleinian approach to free association is concerned with the interpretation of subjects' defence structures against anxiety; a Lacanian approach will aim to explore the unconscious production of subjectivity through discourse. My research is more aligned with this last perspective, both in terms of its purpose and epistemological positioning. This view of free association, with its emphasis on the role of the o/Other, enabled me to pose a question in relation to how this role may shift in the production of my participants' free-associative discourse.

Lastly, I have argued that the free association that emerges in groups, free-floating discussion, is a distinctive mode of unconscious communication, whose intensified intersubjectivity may elicit the emergence of intensified affect, and through which the elusiveness of the place of the Other becomes particularly evident. This preliminary exploration of groups helped me formulate questions about the different effects a group format can have on the emergence of free association, and the extent to which group participants may develop an interest in the group process on itself.

As I have suggested throughout this chapter, subjectivity is structured around an unconscious relation to the Other; a relation that is not easily discerned through the search for coherence and imposition of meaning that often characterises other unstructured approaches to qualitative research. This is why methodological choices that foreground the criticality of this relation, like free association and the use of a group format, seem to be the most applicable to an exploration of these aspects, allowing glimpses of the different ways in which they are enacted in the production of subjectivity.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

Introduction

As previously stated, this study aims to explore the production of early childhood (EC) educator subjectivities in the Chilean context. In the preceding chapter, I explicated my view of unconscious aspects of lived experience as key to subjectivation processes; importantly, my understanding of subjectivity as produced in our relations to others; and my advancement of free association as a particularly suitable method to explore these unconscious dynamics. Furthermore, I justified my proposing of a group modality - in concordance with my focus on the relational aspects of subjectivity - as an innovative way to explore the emergence of free association and its potential to produce accounts of subjectivity. Consequently, I posed free-associative group interviews as my main data production method.

My elaboration of the notions of unconscious, free association and groups has conceptually informed my approach to my main research question, enriching the formulation of my research sub questions; which I restate here, outlining their relation to my fieldwork activities. As I explain in this chapter, as children are at the centre of the pedagogical relations that shape EC educators' practice, I use their accounts of their representations of *the child* as an entry point for the exploration of their professional subjectivities.

In what follows, I give an overview of my research method - the free-associative group interviews - and discuss key aspects of its implementation: the way in which the empirical groups were configured; the process of conducting and following-up the interviews; and my reflection on a potential ethical dilemma concerning my position as researcher. Lastly, I describe the process of preparing and analysing the data and outline the rationale that underpinned the structuring of the analysis chapters, with a special focus on my participation in a collaborative data analysis group and the meaningful impact this had on my engagement with my data. I argue that participating in both the free-associative group interviews and the data analysis group allowed me to gain direct insight into how groups work in a way that acknowledges the ever-shifting character of producing knowledge about the unconscious.

1. The serendipitous opportunity of working with two groups

In this section I describe the circumstances that led me to work with two very diverse groups of participants. As I anticipated that the chosen research method would allow the production of rich and voluminous data, I was prepared to work with one or two groups of four to six EC educators each, considering this an appropriate number of group participants in order for everyone to have the chance to speak.

While working with one group was an acceptable scenario for me, working with two groups had the benefit of compensating for a potential low attendance, increasing the probability of conducting each planned interview with at least one full group of participants. It would also allow me to consider the extent to which the groups' responses to the interview activities might have been determined by each group's particular characteristics rather than the activities themselves.

Potential participants in this research were EC educators who (at the time of initial contact) had recently attended, or were attending, an EC education postgraduate course or a voluntary continuing professional development course. The rationale for inviting this profile of EC educators was to maximise my possibility of recruiting educators who had already demonstrated a keenness to engage with demanding reflexive activities in relation to their practice. In other words, those who could potentially develop the significant type of commitment required by my study following the request to engage in unusual research activities for a significant period of time.

I made use of my professional connection with two schools of EC education based at two Chilean universities to contact recent postgraduate and diploma students. Between January and February 2018 I approached potential participants via email, providing them with basic information about the focus of the study and inviting them to participate in the project from March 2018. I asked them to get back to me if they were interested and emphasised the completely voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw at all times. While ten educators initially got in touch and expressed their interest in the project, eight ultimately confirmed their participation thus giving me the opportunity to arrange and work with two groups of four participants each.

Given the particular nature of the study, significant time was devoted to obtaining the informed consent of participants. It took time to explain in detail the methodology that would be used, what was expected from their participation, the implications of engaging in free-associative activities, and the possibility of experiencing unexpected effects as a result of their participation in the study. Three crucial aspects were

particularly emphasised when collecting participants' informed consent, as well as systematically reminded to them throughout the course of the project. First, the fact that by following the free-associative rule - that is, trying to limit censorship of what they will say - participants may find themselves talking about things they did not expect to reveal; and that this made their consent to continue participating in the study by definition ongoing. Secondly, that as their emotional investment in the group interviews could not be completely anticipated, it was possible for participants to experience discomfort or distress during the group interviews; and that if this should happen, they would be offered psychological support and reminded of their ability to withdraw. Specifically, if requested, I would offer them individual sessions to discuss their experience of participation, and/or put them in contact with low cost counselling services. Lastly, the clarification and acknowledgement that the study solicited participants to take part in six, weekly one-hour group interviews, a significant amount of time for busy professionals as EC educators; and the expectation that they would be able to make valuable connections between the interviews and their practice, balancing or hopefully outweighing the call on their time.

The eight participants were female educators; six of them worked in the classroom, and two of them worked in academia. The six practicing educators worked in state-funded settings: four school-based settings and two kindergartens. They had between 12 and 37 years of experience, and their ages ranged from late thirties to early fifties. Of these six participants, the two more experienced educators had worked throughout their career with children from zero to five years-old, while the other four tended to specialise in particular age groups. Lastly, of the two remaining educators, one was in her early twenties and worked as a tutor and research assistant, and the other was in her early thirties and worked as a lecturer. As seen, without aiming for it, I was extremely fortunate to recruit a very diverse group of educators. The participants' varied professional backgrounds and, even more so, the serendipitous way in which they self-allocated themselves in the two research groups, gave a distinctive character to each of them. This allowed me to glimpse the ways in which particular professional circumstances can affect EC practice, while foregrounding some of the different ways in which group dynamics play out. I describe the eight participants and their allocation in the groups in more detail in subsection 3.1 (below).

2. Overview of the method

My research method consisted in conducting six, free-associative group interviews, each of one hour of duration, with both groups of four participants. This method was

developed in an iterative process, informed by different aspects of my planning. First, my theoretical interest in the notion of unconscious and the role of the Other in the production of subjectivity led to my decision to use free-associative group interviews. The group aspect of the method was further informed by my previous professional experience of working with groups and my methodological interest in exploring the potential of this specific format of free-associative interviews. Secondly, the need to elicit material to explore my main research question regarding the production of the professional subjectivities of EC educators led to my development of specific prompts and activities for each of the interviews.

Although the specifics of the method continued to develop throughout the project, my initial approach to the free-associative interviews aimed to address theoretically-informed sub questions around the notions of the unconscious, free association and groups. I present here the final version of these questions, whose formulation I refined in the last stages of my project:

Table 1: Research sub questions

Concept	Sub question
The unconscious	What are participants' experiences of normative discourses on EC education?
	What is the role of their unconscious attachments in their engagement with these discourses?
	How do participants' unconscious investments in EC practice permeate both their experience and discourse on their own practice?
Free association	In which ways might the clinical ethos of free association help produce glimpses of the unconscious aspects of the educators' professional subjectivities?
	How may the role of the o/Other be affected by the group context; who would be the o/Other to which the educators address themselves in the free-associative interviews?
Groups	Will the group context disrupt or stimulate the emergence of the educators' free-associative discourse?
	Will the educators develop an interest on the group on itself, similarly to what takes place in clinically oriented groups?

As mentioned above, a second aspect of the method was the development of specific prompts and activities for the interviews. In order to do this, I used participants' accounts of their representations of *the child* as an entry point to gain access to some instances of their professional subjectivities. This focus on the educators' accounts of the child sought mainly to explore how they subjectify themselves in their professional relationships as children are arguably the crucial counterpart in their pedagogical relations. Thus, I posed the following fieldwork question: How do EC educators use their representations of the child to give an account of their professional subjectivities?

In order to provide different angles I devised six fieldwork sub questions, each of them suggesting a specific prompt for each interview. Given the free-associative character of the interviews, I did not use an interview schedule, rather simply giving participants at the beginning of each session a prompt to free associate to during the interview, asking them to say everything that came to mind in relation to it.

The first two sessions requested participants to free-associate to the term 'EC education' and the word 'párvulo'[27]. The term 'EC education' was chosen to offer a smooth starting point for the creation of a free-floating discussion, while the word 'párvulo' was expected to elicit slightly more affectively invested associations. For session three, participants were requested to bring an artefact that reminded them of 'the child'. When phrasing this request, I deliberately avoided expressions like 'represents the child' or 'symbolises the child', to discourage rationalised responses to the task. The prompts for session four were curriculum extracts from the Chilean EC education curriculum, selected with a focus on explicit references to 'the child'. In session five, participants were asked to evoke moments or instances from their pedagogical biographies that shaped their representations of the child to enrich their revisiting of previous associations and stimulate the production of new ones. In session six, participants were asked to react to extracts of quotes from other participants, also selected with a focus on representations of the child. Lastly, during the last part of this session, participants were asked about their experience of having participated in the project. The prompts used in each session, were the following:

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[27] Term used in Chile for children who attend EC education.

Table 2: Free-associative interview sessions[28]

Session	Fieldwork sub question	Interview prompt
1	What associations emerge in EC educators' responses to the term 'EC education'?	The term 'EC education'.
2	What associations emerge in EC educators' responses to the word 'párvulo'?	The word 'párvulo'.
3	What associations emerge in EC educators' responses to an EC-related artefact?	An artefact brought by each participant, *'Please bring an artefact that reminds you of children'*.
4	What associations emerge in EC educators' responses to a policy document?	Extracts from the Chilean EC education curriculum.
5	What biographical elements are evoked by EC educators when making sense of their construction of the child?	Asking participants to reflect on elements of their pedagogical biography they think that shaped their construction of the child.
6	What associations emerge in response to other participants' material?	Extracts from other participants' quotes from previous sessions.
	How do educators describe and evaluate their participation in the interviews?	Asking participants to reflect on their participation in the series of interviews.

As previously explained, free association offers an innovative approach to research on subjectivity that emphasises its unconscious aspects. My use of free-associative interviews sought to draw attention to the materiality of words and to refrain from giving interpretations as attempting to provide meaning may compromise the emergence of new meanings. From a free-associative perspective, digressions and contradictions in speech would be considered significant and helpful; while in other approaches the relevance of these might perhaps be questioned, or there might not be such an explicit commitment to allowing the flow of discourse to develop. Similarly, psychoanalytically-informed work with groups that pays special attention to their unconscious dynamics - for example, Lapping and Glynos's (2018) work with groups of teaching assistants - stands out from other approaches to the use of groups in qualitative research which tend to focus on the manifest aspects of groups' interactions.

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[28] In February 2018 I had the opportunity to pilot two sessions with three EC educators who were studying an MA in EC education, thus meeting the criteria I looked for in my potential participants. I drew useful preliminary observations about the participants' engagement with this type of interviews; notably, the fact that a different number of participants seemed to give a different character to the dynamics of the discussion.

3. A more in depth look at the method

In this section, I address four aspects of the implementation of the method. First, I describe how the groups were formed and their composition. Secondly, I give an account of the experience of conducting the free-associative interviews and discuss some aspects of their implementation. Then, I describe a further stage of the project which involved conducting follow-up individual interviews with participants, months after the end of the group sessions. Lastly, I reflect on a potential ethical predicament concerning my position as researcher.

3.1 The groups

Participants were divided in two groups, each group consisting of four members and me. The groups were allocated by convenience and self-selection by participants themselves according to their preferred time to attend the group sessions. There was a 'morning' group, which worked from 10 to 11:30; and a 'noon' group, which met between 12:00 and 13:30.

The meetings were held between March and May 2018. We met on Saturdays, outside of working hours, so participants could keep their involvement in the research independent from their work life if desired. Several participants described attending the sessions as an instance of personal time, as they would normally devote Saturday mornings to activities for others, such as household chores, family commitments, or even lesson planning, given the scarce time they have during workdays to do this.

Participants' allocation in groups and work experience

Both groups were composed of three practicing educators and one of the educators that worked in academia. Apart from their years of experience and the age of the children they worked with, participants mentioned funding, and whether the setting was school-based or a kindergarten as important elements that shaped their everyday practice. In general, Chilean state-funded settings tend to have more financial difficulties than fully privately-funded settings. Among other reasons, these financial difficulties arise because of the increased costs associated to catering for the needs of a higher proportion of socioeconomically vulnerable children[29] (MINEDUC, 2013). Although many settings receive a subsidy for these children, the absence or low parental co-payment ultimately translates into reduced financial resources. Chile also

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[29] The notion of *vulnerable children* constitutes an official category within Chile's educational system (*priority student* is the term used in the present), defined according to the socioeconomic characterisation of children's homes.

follows the global trend in which school-based EC settings are frequently compelled to implement a highly schoolified practice, with a marked focus on curricular alignment and the overall progression to primary education (OECD, 2019).

In the morning group, the three practising educators worked in state-funded schools, and with the same age group (four and five year-olds). They described facing similar challenges in their practice; for instance, as suggested above, a lack of material and financial resources and significant pressures of schoolification. As none of them had worked in kindergartens throughout their careers, they virtually never discussed nor seemed inclined to make comparisons with this type of EC setting. The educators in this group often described participating in the interviews as cathartic, especially when discussing the shortcomings of Chilean EC education and the lack of parental skills of today's parents, both recurring topics in their sessions.

In the noon group, the three practising educators worked in state-funded settings, two of them in kindergartens, and one of them in a school. With the exception of one of the kindergarten-based educators, the other two practising educators had worked both in schools and kindergartens. Thus, this group was often very keen on discussing the 'profound' differences between both types of settings. Similarly, as each of them worked with children of different ages, they were very interested in how differently children learn and how the role of the educator changes significantly depending on the age group they work with. In general, this group declared they felt optimistic about the future of Chilean EC education, and were very enthusiastic about the progress of EC education as a field. The following table summarises this characterisation of participants, highlighting their role, years of experience, type of setting and age of the children they work with:

Table 3: Groups and participants

Group	Pseudonym	Work experience
Morning group	Amelia	Amelia has worked as a **special needs' educator** in an EC classroom for **12 years**. She has always worked at state-funded **schools** with children between two and five years old. At the time of the sessions, she worked with **four and five year-olds**.
	Juana	Juana is a **university lecturer** who had recently obtained her PhD in EC education.
	Rafaela	Rafaela has worked as an **EC educator** in an EC classroom for **37 years**. She has worked at state-funded and non-state funded schools with children from zero to five years old. At the time of the sessions, she worked in a state-funded **school** with **four and five year-olds**.
	Violeta	Violeta is **head of EC education** in a school's 'technical-pedagogical unit[30]'. She worked as an EC educator in an EC classroom until 2017. She has always worked at state-funded **schools** with children between **four and five years old**.
Noon group	Blanca	Blanca has worked as an **EC educator** in an EC classroom for **27 years**, working at state and non-state funded schools and kindergartens with zero to five year olds. At the time of the sessions, she worked in a state-funded **kindergarten** with **zero and one year-olds**.
	Delia	Delia is a **university tutor** and **research assistant** who graduated as an EC educator in 2017.
	Eva	Eva has worked as an **EC educator** in an EC classroom for **27 years**. She has worked at state-funded and non-state funded schools and kindergartens and has always worked with **four and five year-olds**. At the time of the sessions, she worked in a state-funded **school**.
	Ida	Ida has been an **EC educator** in an EC classroom for **23 years**. She has always worked at state-funded **kindergartens**, with children from zero to three years old. At the time of the sessions, she worked with **two and three year-olds**.

Attendance in the six sessions[31]

The noon group had a consistent attendance to the sessions; four of the six sessions had a full group attendance. Conversely, the morning group had very irregular attendance. In this group, two of the four participants attended only two sessions; and two sessions were attended by only one participant. The following table details the attendance of both groups to the sessions, highlighting in green and red the sessions with maximum and minimum attendance:

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[30] A specific department (in the Chilean school system), in charge of curriculum implementation and assessment.

[31] For further details on participants' attendance, please see Appendix 2.

Table 4: Attendance to sessions

Session	Free-associate to	Number of participants	
		Morning group	Noon group
1	'EC education'.	4	4
2	'The párvulo'.	2	3
3	EC-related artefacts.	1	4
4	The Chilean EC curriculum.	2	2
5	Pedagogical biographies.	3	4
6	Quotes from previous sessions.	1	4
*	Additional social meeting.	0	2

While the sessions conducted with four and with three participants were not particularly different from each other, the sessions with two participants seemed to stimulate the emergence of a cohesive shared discourse. This type of discourse tended to be quite affectively invested and often included idealised elements. For instance, as I show below, a morning group session attended by two participants gave birth to especially heartfelt accounts of the vulnerable child. Similarly, a dyadic session of the noon group seemed to stimulate an idealised discourse on vocation. Lastly, the discourse that emerged in the sessions with only one participant was, in general, very introspective and full of reminiscences.

3.2 Working with free association

As stated in the previous chapter, my research is aligned with a Lacanian understanding of free association both in terms of the knowledge about the subject that (it is claimed) can be produced, and how the relation to the other is understood. From this perspective, free association's main aim is to destabilise the (apparent) coherence of discourse making obvious its ambiguity and by doing so revealing what is ambivalent, contradictory and ultimately surprising about it. At the same time, the relation between the utterer and the receiver of free-associative discourse is seen as enigmatic, and it is precisely the acknowledgement of this otherness that allows one to grasp some of what is new and unknown about the unconscious.

While a Lacanian mode of intervening often entails interrupting the free-associative discourse, punctuating the parts that are deemed important, I intervened very little during the interviews, mostly repeating some of the participants' words and summarising their discussions at the end of some sessions. There were two contrasting reasons for this: my uncertainty about where to punctuate, and also my curiosity to see how the group's discourse developed on its own.

I occasionally punctuated the participants' associations, repeating specific words to them. For instance, in one session I repeated the signifier 'vows' to a participant who repeatedly talked about 'renewing vows' when elaborating on the notion of vocation, as her use of the word seemed to be quite close to the idea of religious or nuptial vows. In another session, I repeated the signifier 'overwhelmedness' to a participant, as it had emerged several times in her speech in a seemingly affectively invested manner. In these two examples, the participant reacted to the repeated signifier with perplexity: 'What vows?', 'What do you mean by overwhelmedness?', yet this initial moment of bewilderment preceded a deeper elaboration on these concepts. Not every one of my punctuations hit home though; participants did not always react, for instance, to my repetition of the terms 'holistic' or 'crazy children'. I once repeated to a participant 'independent republic', as that is what she called her classroom, hoping to stimulate her curiosity about what other meanings may hide behind choosing that name to describe the place she works at every day. However, when I repeated the phrase to her, she just expanded on her description of her classroom, reacting as if it was a purely descriptive term, almost a synonym of classroom, without any metaphorical meaning.

On some occasions, I briefly rephrased some of the main elements of their discourse as we approached the end of each session, often aiming to bring the session to a close. For instance, I closed session four (on curriculum) in one of the groups saying: 'to be invisible, homogenisation, enjoyment, to erase one's own identity, to forget who you are… These are some of the things you have mentioned, you can take some additional minutes to think of those words… see if something else comes to mind'. Several times this kind of interventions stimulated further elaborations, yet participants did not respond in this way consistently.

As mentioned above, I often refrained from punctuating participants' associations. While I was able to pinpoint seemingly important signifiers of their discourse on several occasions, I felt that punctuating at an untimely moment could block further elaborations on the signifier already at play, compromising the spontaneous course of the discussion. Conversely, participants had a key role in sustaining the emerged shared discourse, by engaging with commitment in an affective manner with other participants' interventions and contents. For instance, five of the six participants who shared an artefact in session three brought an object from their own childhood or

something related to very personal aspects of their life[32]. During this session, participants were visibly moved by their groupmates' stories and reflections, often evoking emotional memories of their own, among other responses.

While I rarely returned their associations to participants, the group itself seemed to assume that function. As I explain below, there was an indication that participants had an opportunity to hear their own associations as they passed through other participants and returned to them in an interpellating manner. This return of associations to participants seemed to either reflect or intensify their emotions, often demanding that they, for example, take a position on ethically challenging professional issues.

Participants did not often rephrase elements of each other's discourses, yet when they did it seemed to have the effect of increasing the emotional intensity of the exchange. For instance, two participants who were fantasising about the experience of a child of divorced parents engaged in the following exchange:

> V.: *[my mom]* has another partner, maybe a much bigger family now, so where do I fit?
> R.: Which one do I belong to?
> V.: Which one do I belong to? Where do I come from?

This brief echoing moment seemed to intensify their shared fantasy, progressing to an even gloomier depiction of the circumstances of the children of divorced parents. In general, participants listened and reacted to their groupmates in a lively manner: they laughed, lamented, expressed astonishment, admiration, sadness, incredulity, and so forth. For instance, they were baffled to hear that a student teacher had chosen to pursue an EC degree because of wanting to be a head teacher:

> B.: Why did you choose this career? (B. asked to one of her student teachers), *Oh because I'd like to be a head teacher*
> E.: WHAAT
> I.: Are you sure you want to be a head teacher? (laughs)
> E.: Get outta here!

At other time, they united in a dismissive attitude towards student teachers who are not very skilful or who failed to show a strong passion about EC education:

> I.: Gosh... Why doesn't she just go to work in retail?
> E.: (laughs)
> I.: so she does less harm

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[32] The shared artefacts were a doll; an image of a bicycle; a children's book from when one of the participants was a child; the photograph of a participant's late grandmother; and a drawing of a participants' family, made by her students at a period when she was grieving the loss of her partner.

B.: and earns more!
All: (laugh)
I.: and she does less harm

Similarly, a group shared the sadness of one of the participants who witnessed how an autistic child was thrown out of a ceremony at school after a teacher declared 'Why did they invite that boy? Oh, that boy is awful...':

E.: I felt sad, so sad… I thought about this the whole day because… besides of being a such a shame it was sad, so sad
D.: what a terrible situation
I.: so shocking
B.: such a pity (…) now, sorry for asking but did you, eventually, talk with the teacher about this, made her realise…?
E.: no... there was no time (...)

These examples mostly show agreement and complicity, yet there were times in which disagreement and antagonism emerged. For instance, a participant reacted quite negatively to an extract from an anecdote told by another participant:

A text caught my attention, a joke told by a little girl... I didn't find it funny… it made me feel uncomfortable... I was uncomfortable because it was mentioned like that, like a joke… that story in general... I was conflicted about the texts; I did not like them. The joke seemed to me… the way she tells the story… I beg your pardon, what are we talking about? I mean, I don't agree...[33]

On other occasion, a participant expressed her disagreement with other two participants who asserted that children at school should only eat what they want:

it is very complex because, I was listening to you now and yes… the child is a subject of law. But there are things that... there are children who have their preferences, they come from different places and one has to respect that, but you also have to worry about their basic needs. And what you said about, 'if they don't like it, they just don't like it...' many times you can't do that because you have to teach them[34].

As seen, the educators took part in affectively invested dialogues on several occasions, exhibiting significant engagement with the topics discussed and the emotions they evoked.

Clinical aspects of my work with the groups

In terms of the overlap between free association in research and clinical practice, the implications of this overlap and the decisions that must be made concerning this, I did

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[33] I discuss this quotation and its context of production from an ethical perspective in subsection 3.4.
[34] This exchange is discussed in detail in the first chapter of analysis.

not utilise countertransference[35] as an intervention tool. That is, at no point did I discuss with participants my transferential responses to their material, nor did I provide interpretations of what these responses could indicate about their unconscious processes. Nevertheless, I did register my countertransferential experience of every interview in a research journal. These notes were of great help when revisiting my data during the analysis, allowing me to reconsider and qualify many of my initial reactions to the material. For instance, they showed me how I tended to dismiss some of the participants' narratives when I deemed them overly idealised or dubiously plausible. An example of this involves a participant's remarkably idealised account of the idyllic childhood that her parents gave her and the contrasting memory of feeling utterly terrified of her kindergarten educator, to the extent that she did not dare to ask permission to go to the toilet and pee'd herself in the classroom. While my initial response to this material seemed to downplay the importance of both its idealised and upsetting aspects, returning to my journal helped me acknowledge the undeniably traumatic character of this classroom experience.

When psychosocial researchers, like Frosh and Baraitser (2008), make a call to be cautious in the use of psychoanalytic tools, the emphasis is often placed on the fact that the researcher is not a clinician. I would add that regardless of the researcher's training, what is important is that the research interaction is not a therapeutic encounter; a crucial awareness that should frame every intervention. This proviso was particularly important for me, given my training as a clinical psychologist and concomitant professional inclination to make interpretations of psychoanalytic material.

It can be argued though that my clinical training was not completely irrelevant in the context of my research as it informed my ability to recognise and my readiness to manage the emergence of emotion during the sessions. Given free association's aim of eliciting the expression of unconscious content, I allowed - in psychotherapeutic terms - expressive, as opposed to supportive, interactions among participants to take place. An expressive mode of work aims at allowing the free emergence of affect, regardless of how potentially difficult or negative the revealed emotions or content may be. The

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[35] As described in the previous chapter, transference can be understood as the unconscious transferring of other emotionally significant relationships on to the therapist by the patient, while countertransference consists in the therapist's responses to these transferences, as well as their own transferring of emotionally significant relationships on to the patient. In psychosocial research, the relevant, corresponding dyad is that of the researcher and the research participant.

underlying rationale for this approach sees emotional expression and mobilisation as an indispensable aspect of psychic change. Conversely, a supportive approach primarily seeks to offer containment and ease the experience of negative affect. This makes it particularly suitable for patients who suffer from severe conditions like psychotic states, in which the engagement with reality is compromised and the emergence of unbearable psychic pain is prevalent. By leaning towards the expressive end of the continuum, I allowed the occurrence of uncomfortable situations like prolonged silences and tense exchanges between participants; while I was ready to move, at all times, towards a more supportive management of the group if a participant were to feel distressed or upset.

3.3 Following up the free-associative group interviews

Around nine months after the end of the series of free-associative interviews, I conducted individual follow-up interviews each lasting between 30 minutes and an hour with five of the research participants. The idea of conducting these interviews first arose after starting the data analysis; it seemed that additional material might be helpful to (for instance), gain insight into the extent to which I may have imposed interpretations on participants' material based only in the group interviews.

Specifically, the follow-up interviews aimed to explore what participants recalled and their thoughts and feelings about having participated in the free-associative interviews. I particularly sought to get a different perspective on the group interactions that took place during sessions, especially in relation to the emergence of uncompromising discourses and the affective intensity of the exchanges. For instance, to see how moments of apparent agreement during the sessions may have been experienced differently by some participants. The interview schedule comprised the following questions:

Table 5: Follow-up interview questions

1. What do you remember about what was talked about in the sessions?
2. What was it like being in the group?
3. What was something especially nice or positive of having participated in the project?
4. What was something especially difficult or negative of having participated in the project?

As seen, the first question aims at an evocation of the content of the discussions, while the second refers to the group modality of the interviews. When phrasing this last question, I deliberately avoided to ask about 'participating', 'interacting', 'relating to others in', 'being a part/member of', or 'belonging to' the group, so not to pre-empt

specific responses nor suggest particular engagements with the group. Lastly, questions three and four were framed in terms of 'nice/positive' and 'difficult/negative', in the hope of stimulating a more emotional response without stressing particularly either the 'content' or the 'group' aspect.

Five of the eight participants took part in the follow-up interviews, giving accounts of their perceptions of the process. While at the beginning of these interviews it seemed hard for participants to remember the group sessions, as they started talking they were able to remember them with great detail, to the point of remembering some of the interventions - made by them or others - nearly verbatim. I was able to draw useful observations from these interviews; participants gave indications of having kept thinking about sessions, and some of their perspectives on what had transpired seemed in fact to have shifted (or maybe they were just revealed after being censored during the group experience). For instance, a participant admitted she wished she had intervened differently, conveying her opinions more strongly; while another participant considered, in hindsight, that the perspectives of some of the other educators were at times too extreme and uncompromising.

The follow-up interviews gave me the opportunity to ponder the elusive possibility that participants had explored or learnt something new about them themselves as a product of their engagement with free association. For example, a follow-up interview with one participant, Ida, suggested that a subtle subjective shift may have taken place. During the first moments of our audio call, while still catching up before starting the interview, Ida told me that she had recently been made redundant from the kindergarten she worked at. While this was quite unexpected to her, she also felt 'it was about time', and the 'end of an era' which offered her a 'great opportunity'. She had recently started to look for a new job with no luck and was considering starting an MA programme in EC education. After the follow-up interview we stayed in touch, in case I heard of a job. The last time we talked she had still not found a job but had been shortlisted for a position at the EC sub-secretariat (of the Chilean Ministry of Education) and was happily studying her masters full time, something she had wanted to do 'for a long time'. While being made redundant is something that depends on external, 'real world' circumstances, it is possible that Ida's engagement with free association may have helped her to imagine herself in a different scenario, under a different light, maybe fostering a receptiveness to new destabilising circumstances such as losing her job. Throughout the sessions she was able to give expression to a perception of the EC classroom as potentially overwhelming, articulating her desire to

do research and work in academia[36]; realisations that resonated with her subsequent professional choices.

3.4 Fear of acting out: my affective experience of the group process

As previously described, two participants stopped attending the interviews before the end of the project. Their withdrawal elicited negative feelings in me and a concomitant fear of acting out these feelings. That is, to unconsciously act them out in the group sessions. I experienced this dilemma with great concern signifying it as an ethical predicament whose avoidance paradoxically led me to act out in a different way. I argue that my unconscious experience of the group process may have intensified my affective response to this quandary. Ultimately, I contend it may not be completely possible for the researcher to 'control' their intersubjective engagement with their participants nor, more generally, their affective investments in the overall research process.

An overcompensating response to the emergence of negative affect

The two participants who left the project, Juana (J.) and Violeta (V.), belonged to the morning group. V., who did not come back after session two, at first excused her absences, yet in the end ceased altogether to reply messages and to show up to sessions. Somewhere between sessions three and four of my project, we ran into each other at an EC education event convened by my research centre. V. seemed happy to see me and we had a nice chat; a friendliness that made me think I would see her in the next sessions. In a somewhat self-referential way, I thought it was unlikely that someone - quite proximate to my professional sphere - who had engaged in this activity would leave my study, let alone 'ghost' me.

J., on the other hand, the recently graduated doctor in education, only attended sessions one and five. While one of her absences was previously agreed and another one was due to an emergency, the two remaining absences were due to her participation in academic activities she was invited to take part after committing to participate in my study. When discussing her absences, J. seemed to aim to both rationalise and naturalise her ceasing to participate; she felt that her interventions in the sessions were not very helpful and that I should understand participants' withdrawal as a natural part of any research.

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[36] Ida's engagement in a reflection around these topics is explored in detail in the second chapter of analysis.

V. and J.'s leaving the project made me feel sad and frustrated. I did not get to know the reason behind V.'s withdrawal as she did not reply when I got in touch about a possible follow-up interview either. At the same time, I resented what I saw as J.'s condescending comment on attrition; having worked in research since my early twenties, I did not like to be told what to expect from my own research. I also felt let down by the lack of a certain solidarity I had expected to find in a fellow researcher who had very recently been 'in my shoes' collecting her own data. While I did not seem to experience clearly negative feelings in relation to V.'s disengagement with the project apart from sadness and frustration, I felt aware of my resentfulness of J.'s withdrawal. This awareness made me especially self-conscious about my responses to J.'s material, and led me to think that, if I were to deem some parts of this material as not very useful, I should initially distrust this perception and carefully monitor where this reaction may have come from. In general, I considered J.'s interventions very evocative and productive, a reaction that reassured me of not having acted out my hard feelings. However, it is likely that the exact opposite took place; my very receptive disposition towards J.'s material may have been overcompensatory, censoring other possible reactions. As seen, research relationships can elicit troublesome emotional responses, whose 'spilling' over other aspects of research cannot be completely contained. In this case, while my psychoanalytic approach to my research made me especially aware and helped me identify some of these emotions, my defensive attempts to keep them at bay arguably led me to a peculiar, far from unprejudiced, engagement with J.'s data.

Acting out in a group session

In what follows, I discuss the group instance in which I arguably acted out the above described emotions. During the last session with the noon group, I asked participants to react to extracts of quotes from the morning group, in order to further stimulate their associations. My expectation was that they would engage with the material in a friendly way, just as they had done in every previous session. Against my prediction, Ida (I.) and Blanca (B.) were quite judgemental of some morning group quotations, making remarks like 'it does not seem right to me' in response to a quotation from J.; or 'it is worrisome these are professionals, colleagues we are talking about', in response to statements in which children were talked about in an informal way (for example as *cubs*, *baby goats* or *munchkins*). Contrarily, Eva (E.) said she did not think it was a bad thing to use these terms of endearment to children, and that she in fact called her students *little chickens*. J.'s statement and I.'s response to it were the following:

> Carolina was her name... she was a munchkin... she was a two years old little peanut... she was not three years old yet, and she got up and said '*I'm going to tell a joke ... I invented it*' (laughs) and she had invented it, and it was a joke... mmm I'm going to tell you, it was a little naughty... she said: '*once there was a girl, who put on her knickers inside out... then another girl came and said: 'hey, you dropped a poop [sic]*' (laughs) and I thought it was so good, at that moment I thought it was so good, because... she is realising that... she pictured the knickers inside out... I don't know how to explain it... not like... not put on backwards but inside out, and there, then I said ' *of course, you drop the poop [sic]*' get it? It's very silly, but... at that moment, I said '*this girl... is capable of elaborating something much more... deep*' than I thought she was capable of at the age she had

I.: A text caught my attention, a joke told by a little girl... I didn't find it funny, I found it like... I don't know, like... it made me feel uncomfortable... I was uncomfortable because it was mentioned like that, like a joke, no... uh, that story in general, that text caught my attention... I don't know, it doesn't apply... the comments did not (...) I was conflicted about the *[extracts]*, I didn't like them. The joke seemed to me... when she says... the way she tells the story... I beg your pardon, what are we talking about? I mean, I disagree, let's say, no...

Coca[37]: Which part do you disagree with?

I.: With how the adult addresses that joke, I mean, it validates a bit... *'the poop inside out'*? I beg your pardon, what are we talking about?... see, it's not that we are prudish nor much less, I'm speaking of my kindergarten reality... we try to never make fun of a child, I mean, I feel there is a mockery there, and moreover it was associated to learning, I didn't understand... I didn't understand that text in general, it was complicated to me

At that moment, I felt sad about what I deemed to be a negative judgement of other participant. Moreover, I felt guilty about this 'unfair' treatment to J.'s quote, which I had chosen for this activity precisely as I considered it to be a great quote. The fact that I was cross with J. because of her lack of commitment to my study seemed to increase my feelings of guilt in what may be understood as an instance of projection; the omnipotent idea that my resentment could somehow permeate and influence the group's judgement, predisposing them to respond negatively to J.'s material. On a more conscious level, I first thought that the simple fact of cross-sharing quotations between groups may have elicited the antagonism. If this was the case, the decision to share the quotes had been an ethical misjudgement, in which I failed to 'protect' participants' data. However, E. and to a lesser extent, Delia (D.) showed me there was nothing about sharing the other group's quotations that necessarily encouraged a negative response. This can be seen in E.'s response to J.'s quotation:

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[37] The nickname that everyone calls me by.

> I didn't see it as mockery... honestly, I interpreted it... like that child is able to generate a situation that can cause laughter to others, and that in that sense the educator was... was validating the fact that the girl... that girl could make much deeper reflections because she was already realising, at that moment, that something could make others laugh. I looked at it in that way, it's like when we work with jokes with the children at school, and we teach the kids jokes, and they tell their own jokes... any nonsense ... '*that a little boy was walking and there was a stone and he fell and hit on the bum*', I don't know, they make up things and one laughs at the joke, not at the child. I didn't see it the way you did (talking to I.)

My first response to the situation was to provide more context to the quotations in the hope that this would moderate I. and B.'s negative responses, yet I did not completely succeed. I continued to give more context but soon felt I should stop so as not to get into an advocacy or apology for the morning group's quotations. Then I reframed - for the first time during the series of sessions - the rules of our work together, emphasising the importance of not judging each other. I demanded that participants react to written material with the same friendliness I expected them to show their groupmates. In doing this, I somehow failed to differentiate between participants and their productions while, with the final request, contradicting the demand that they react in a truly uncensored way to any material presented. Ultimately, my simultaneous projection and censoring of negative affect in participants may have compromised the free expression of their responses, something that fortunately only happened in this last session of group meetings. As can be seen, I was as susceptible as any other group member to experiencing intensified unconscious affects. My persecutory fear of projecting and concomitant censoring of negative affect, provide an indication of how powerful I deemed the circulation of affect to be within the group. In hindsight, I came to see my acting out in this situation as not particularly problematic, while offering me a further opportunity to experientially learn about group functioning. Nevertheless, I do think that sensitive issues can emerge as a product of free association's unfolding of intensified affect in unanticipated, and not completely controllable ways. In relation to this, a psychoanalytic observance of the unconscious dynamics that underlie research relationships may be precisely what allows the researcher to ethically problematise their relationship with participants, and their overall engagement with the myriad aspects of research.

4. Analysis of the data

This study is a qualitative research framed within a psychosocial perspective whose main data collection method was free-associative group interviews. The method of analysis associated with this mode of data production has been described as a

psychoanalytically-informed variant of discourse analysis (Madill & Gough, 2016). Unlike the more widespread thematic approach to qualitative data analysis (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006), which focuses on the coding and grouping of data with similar meanings, discursive methods focus on the detail of the text, drawing on the linguistic aspects of phenomena to produce accounts of them (Madill & Gough, 2016 p. 441). Accordingly, my process of analysis was characterised by a deep exploration of long verbatim extracts.

In what follows I depict my preparation of the data, with a focus on the process of translation. Then, I describe the methodological strategies I used to select the material and draw out the critical aspects of my analysis, outlining the rationale that structures the analysis chapters. Lastly, I give an account of my participation in a data analysis group and its meaningful contribution to my research.

4.1 Data preparation

My dataset consisted of twelve and a half hours of group interviews, and two and a half hours of follow-up individual interviews[38], which I transcribed and translated in full[39]. Translation was a critical aspect of this work, as my data analysis paid special attention to the formal properties of words. My basic sources of translation were the English and Spanish-English Oxford dictionaries; the Royal Spanish Academy dictionary; and the Linguee dictionary (to look up the use of words in context). For every translated extract, I produced a complete translation from scratch (using all the above resources), collated it with the Google Translate app and tweaked it iteratively until feeling as satisfied as possible. When I experienced further doubts, I looked into language forum discussions (e.g. Word Reference) and discussed them with peers who were also translating their data from Spanish to English.

Giving an account of having worked with words at the level of the signifier, does not always correspond with the process of translation to another language. The materiality of the original word, once translated, is on most occasions, lost; *mariposa* is miles away from *schmetterling*. Similarly, in the act of translation, words often lose some of their ambiguity. A participant, A., called her artefact *mono* (literally, monkey), which I translated to *doll*. If you look at a picture of the artefact, we may agree it *is* a doll. Yet in Chile, a *mono* is not only a doll (or a monkey), it can be any anthropomorphic or

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[38] For some basic statistics of the datasets, please see Appendix 3.

[39] As previously mentioned, an additional source of data was my research journal, in which I wrote down my perceptions and feelings after each session -about the participants, specific exchanges, dynamics, etc.- including my emotional disposition before each session.

zoomorphic toy, a teddy bear, an action figure, an animated cartoon, a drawing, a rough sketch on a piece of paper, a poster, a logo, etc. Thus, by choosing one single word to translate it, it is possible something could go missing. One could try, for instance, to play with the polysemy of the word doll (in English) yet it would not make much sense, as it would probably lead us to other spheres of meaning.

A further difficulty is posed by the translation of neutral words. For instance, the Spanish word *le* - neutral third person singular, that can also be a suffix - can mean both *it* and *him/her*. When translating a specific extract in which A. talks about her *doll*, there were at least 20 instances in which I had to decide whether to translate this word/suffix to *it* or *him*. Choosing to use *him* instead of *her* was completely clear, as A. always referred to the doll using masculine articles and pronouns when a gendered use was demanded, e.g. 'I clean him', '(…) taking care of him' and A. always used masculine nouns and adjectives in which, in Spanish, gender must be specified. Yet the question of whether A.'s doll was an *it* or a *he* remained, leaving me in the position of making that choice. The more personificative[40] A.'s description of the doll, the more inclined I felt to choose to translate *le* as *him*, over *it*. For instance, when A. describes showing the doll to her daughter, I translated it as 'I show <u>it</u> to her', whereas when she referred to being the doll's mom, I translated this as 'to be <u>his</u> mom'. I deemed the doll, in the first example, to be more of a toy, while in the second case it may have been closer to a fantasised child. As seen, the translation of these extracts has been largely interpretive, making clear the inexorably translational character of any engagement with language.

4.2 Data analysis

In what follows, I discuss the ongoing, iterative character of my data analysis process, signalling its main stages and how it led to the conception of the analysis chapters. I finish this section with an account of the process of setting up and participating in a collaborative data analysis group. I argue that the data analysis group not only accompanied my analysis process, but gifted me a further opportunity to continue to learn, first-hand, about group functioning and the prolificness of intersubjectivity.

The ongoing development of my analysis process

My first approach to my data was to 'openly' code my twelve groups interviews (and later, the follow-up interviews). I did not code the data thematically but noted down instead formal elements of participants' speech like repetitions, omissions, hesitations,

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[40] Characterized by or involving personification; the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human (EOD).

slips of the tongue and silences whose emergence I took as a possible indication of a mobilisation of affect around their precipitating content.

Some of the first systematic analyses I conducted explored (without being limited to) the educators' accounts of their childhood, and its significance for the formation of their professional identities; the role of their academic trajectories in the negotiation of their professional self-image; their representations of what makes a good educator as a response to society's views on EC education; and their perspectives on how children's identities are produced and performed within EC practice. Carrying out these first analyses informed my decision to focus on the interview transcripts of the sessions 'the child', 'an EC-related artefact' and 'the Chilean EC curriculum'; which I considered the most rich, evocative and affectively invested material.

After this preliminary stage of data analysis, my method evolved into a deep exploration of verbatim extracts, returning to them in an iterative manner. First, approaching them descriptively; then, adding conceptual layers, introducing relevant psychoanalytic concepts; and lastly, developing fuller psychoanalytically-informed discussions around them.

As I became more attuned to the subtleties of my data and progressed in writing my analysis chapters - especially after writing about the unconscious dynamics of a four and a three participants' group session - it became clear that the focus of my analysis would be the participants' production of accounts about their professional subjectivities, as emerged in the context of different group configurations. As a result of this, the second analysis chapter explores what took place in a dyadic session; and the last analysis chapter examines a session attended by only one participant.

In this way, the three analysis chapters are organised around specific data extracts whose mode of production - that is, the number of participants involved in each exchange - constitutes the focus of each chapter. It is worth noting that the extracts discussed in each analysis chapter are taken from the same given interview session, thus there is a thematic and affective continuity between them. The chapters and extracts are arranged as follows:

Table 6: Distribution of extracts in analysis chapters

Chapter	Interview session	N° of participants	Extract	N° of words
What happens in groups: The 'beans' incident	'The child'	3	'The beans incident'[41]	912
What happens in dyads: An 'academic pair'	'The Chilean EC curriculum'	2	'The dyad: on research'	901
			'The dyad: on the child'	894
What happens in a one-participant session: A different kind of thirdness	'An EC-related' Artefact	1	'A big-eyed doll'	518
			'A doll named Mickey'	487
			'Amelia's husband'	342
			'Amelia at the kindergarten: You were also four once?'	459

As a last stage of my analysis I develop, at the end of the analysis chapters, a brief thematic discussion on the EC education topic that stimulated the exchanges examined in each of them, following the specific topic throughout the rest of the material. I decided to carry out these discussions as there is a rich thematic dimension to participants' discussions throughout the interviews that is not particularly addressed in the main analysis chapters. By doing this, I aim to develop insight into participants' engagement in wider debates in EC education, and the extent to which these positionings may inform their affective investments in their professional subjectivities, as elaborated in the analysis chapters. In the three participants' session chapter I address the different EC educator identities that can be produced in kindergartens and school settings. In the dyadic session chapter, I discuss the educators' negotiation of professional knowledge; and in the one-participant session chapter, I trace some of the maternal aspects of EC education.

The contribution of my data analysis group

An important part of my analysis process was my engagement in a data analysis group devised and carried out with two dear friends and PhD colleagues; Felipe and Paulina. The main purpose of the group was to accompany each other while conducting our analyses; we shared the perception that it could be a particularly solitary and potentially overwhelming stage of the doctorate.

What brought us together is that the three of us were researching Chilean teachers' subjectivities; Felipe's work focused on dissident teachers and Paulina's on science education teachers. The group accompanied the shifts in my perspectives on my data

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[41] The names of the extracts make reference to their thematic content.

and, ultimately, the maturation of my understanding of them. In what follows I give a brief account of our working methods, and explicate the specific ways in which the group contributed to my analysis process.

We met regularly between June 2018 and December 2019, holding weekly two-hour sessions in which one of us would bring a selection of their data to discuss. We named the group "Juego, mito, y excusa" ("Play, myth and excuse"), making reference to aspects that were salient in our data - mine, Felipe's and Paulina's, respectively - at the beginning of our group process. By the end of our work together the group's name had changed to "Grupo, bosque, diálogo" ("Group, forest, dialogue") - in relation to my, Felipe's and Paulina's research (again in that order) - reflecting what ended up being the crucial foci of our analyses. The process of re-naming the group signified the beginning of a new stage of our process, synthesising - and by doing so asserting - the evolution of our engagement with our data.

In the sessions dedicated to my research, while the main focus was on my 'preselected' data, I occasionally brought other interview transcripts for discussion; mostly from the interviews on participants' pedagogical biographies or some of the follow-up interviews. The purpose of sharing this additional data was to look for antecedents or clues about the evolution of particular discussions throughout the sessions, or a given participant's engagement in them. In the sessions on my data, I asked my colleagues to share whatever caught their attention about the material, and shared my ideas with them. We discussed at length the meaning of words, often looking for clues in their etymology and their use in context. We looked at, for example, particular phrases and the affect they evoked, the use of metaphors, the extent to which sociological and biographical elements may have been at play in participants' narratives. Although we approached my data free-associatively we did not exclusively focus on a psychoanalytic understandings of them which was very refreshing. My colleagues' backgrounds in biology, pedagogy and sociology informed their understanding of my data, always showing me something new about them. For instance, we tentatively characterised the discourse of one of my participants as sociological, as she seemed to construct ideal types to categorise the engagement of different social actors - like families, institutions, and the state - with EC education. Playing with this idea allowed us to glimpse how this participant's intellectualisation seemed to help her make sense of her own investments in EC practice. Similarly, a biological understanding of the word 'creature' (used by some participants to refer to children) as a living organism, allowed us to go further in our exploration of its polysemy, beyond the initial realisation that a creature may not

necessarily be a human being. For example, the idea that some 'creatures' are totipotent, that is, that can give rise to any cell type; gave us clues to the extent to which the educators' views of the child resonated with societal discourses of children as other-than-human, full of potential beings.

My process of analysis involved spending long periods of time - sometimes over a month - 'alone' with a very dense piece of data, going through it over and over again, many times to the point of getting sick of it. This is why looking at my data through my colleagues' eyes was arguably the group's biggest contribution to my process, gifting me the opportunity to be constantly surprised by my data, and reminding me of how in awe of them I initially was.

The group performed for me the crucial function of showing me the otherness of my data, critically helping me sustain and renew my affectively invested, epistemological relation to them. In this way, the group offered me a further opportunity to experience what can be done in groups; ultimately, the fruitfulness of intersubjective work.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the design and implementation of free-associative group interviews; a unique qualitative research method whose aim, to destabilise discursive coherence through the use of a group modality, entails the potential to reveal unknown aspects of subjectivity.

I have described the serendipitous process of finding my research participants, how my initial methodological interests shaped my devising of theoretically-informed sub questions, and how these were refined throughout the research process. I justified my exploration of participants' accounts of their representations of the child, as a means of glimpsing instances of their professional subjectivities. I have also narrated my experience of implementing the free-associative group interview and some of its challenges, and discussed the importance of the data preparation process, with a special focus on the extent to which translation makes it possible to work with the formal aspects of language.

I have argued that my participation in the group interviews allowed me to grasp first-hand knowledge on how psychoanalytically-informed groups work. This can be observed in my emotional response to the withdrawal of two participants from the study, and my fear of the effects that this response may have in the group process. My unconscious experience of the group both intensified and elicited my awareness of the

affective dynamics at play in this predicament, paradoxically leading me to an unanticipated form of acting out. I contend that it is not completely possible for the researcher to 'control' their affective investments in research; which demands a rigorous reflexivity, critical to the possibility of an ethical engagement with participants.

Finally, I have argued that my participation in a collaborative data analysis group allowed me to gain deeper insight into group functioning; particularly, in relation to the elusive place of the Other in group processes, and its role in revealing what is enigmatic - and therefore new - about subjectivity. My colleagues' free-associative response to my participants' material constantly reminded me of its surprisingness, thus allowing me to sustain my relation to my data.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

These questions and their instantiation are discussed fully within the text of Chapter 4.

Main research question:
How do EC educators produce their professional subjectivities in the current Chilean context?

Main research sub questions:
Through these theoretically-informed sub questions, I explore the unconscious as a way to conceptualise professional subjectivities as well as free association and groups:

Concept	Sub question
The unconscious	What are participants' experiences of normative discourses on EC education?
	What is the role of their unconscious attachments in their engagement with these discourses?
	How do participants' unconscious investments in EC practice permeate both their experience and discourse on their own practice?
Free association	In which ways might the clinical ethos of free association help produce glimpses of the unconscious aspects of the educators' professional subjectivities?
	How may the role of the o/Other be affected by the group context; who would be the o/Other to which the educators address themselves in the free-associative interviews?
Groups	Will the group context disrupt or stimulate the emergence of the educators' free-associative discourse?
	Will the educators develop an interest on the group on itself, similarly to what takes place in clinically oriented groups?

Because it is not possible to explore the unconscious directly, fieldwork questions were conceptualised separately.

Fieldwork question:
How do EC educators use their representations of the child to give an account of their professional subjectivities?

Fieldwork sub questions:
Together these questions address my research questions concerning free association and groups. Questions 1-5 address my question about the production of the educators' professional subjectivities more directly:

1. What associations emerge in EC educators' responses to the term 'EC education'?
2. What associations emerge in EC educators' responses to the word 'párvulo'?
3. What associations emerge in EC educators' responses to an EC-related artefact?
4. What associations emerge in EC educators' responses to a policy document?
5. What biographical elements are evoked by EC educators when making sense of their construction of the child?
6. What associations emerge in response to other participants' material?
7. How do educators describe and evaluate their participation in the interviews?

CHAPTER 5

What happens in groups: The 'beans' incident

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to an analysis of the group dynamics that emerged in the free-associative sessions with the early childhood (EC) educators. Drawing on the premise that groups constitute a particular type of intersubjectivity from which emerges a specific type of mental life characterised by intense unconscious dynamics, I argue that the group format elicited particular position-takings within and between the educators, shaping the relational dynamics and the discourses that stemmed from each session. With the help of the psychoanalytic notion of projective identification, I conceptualise the intensified affective character of the discourse that emerged in one particular session, problematizing its effect on both the educators' experience of relationships within the group and their engagement with the free-associative task.

In order to do this, I focus my analysis on the 'beans' incident, an exchange that took place among three participants during the second working session, devoted to the word 'párvulo'.[42][43] During the incident, the educators exchanged contrasting views on the task of feeding children in the kindergarten. I also include in my analysis complementary extracts from the follow-up interviews (in which participants referred to this exchange) with the purpose of expanding the perspective from which the episode is considered.

As described in the Methodology chapter, my analysis of the data has an iterative character: I firstly introduce the full verbatim extract, subsequently approach it in a descriptive manner ('A first glimpse'), then progressively introduce relevant concepts ('Adding some layers'), to finally provide a fuller conceptual discussion. I finalise each analysis chapter with a brief thematic discussion on a relevant topic of EC education especially thematised by participants during the analysed session. In this chapter, I discuss the identitary effects of school-based EC education.

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[42] As previously described, 'párvulo' is a child who attends EC education (for ease of reading, from now on I will use the word 'child').

[43] The prompts used to stimulate the discussion in the other sessions were; session one: the term *'EC education'*; session three: an *artefact* brought by the educators; session four: *curriculum* extracts; session five: asking them to elaborate on their *pedagogical biography*; and session six: asking them to react to *other participants' extracts*.

1. The 'beans' incident

The following is a seven minutes long extract, starting on minute seven of the second session of the *noon* group (composed by Blanca, Delia, Eva and Ida) in response to the prompt 'say everything that comes to mind when you hear the word child'. Delia - the youngest, most recently graduated educator - did not attend this session, thus only Blanca, Ida and Eva - each with over 20 years of classroom experience - participated in it. Blanca and Ida work at partly state-funded kindergartens located in socially vulnerable boroughs while Eva works at a state-funded school in a socially heterogeneous borough. Blanca works with zero and one year-olds; Ida, with two and three year-olds; and Eva, with four and five year-old children.

While similar exchanges among participants can be found in several moments throughout the data, I chose this extract as it crystallises the position taking and mobilisation of affect that often took place in full-group and three-participant sessions, arguably brought about by some of the unconscious mechanisms at play.

1.1 Full extract

> **Ida**: this is what unsettles me (breathes in) why do we want quiet children, why do children have to be quiet, *'What do you mean by quiet?'* We don't want children to move (...)[44] or we want all children to eat their food. But why? Maybe they don't like beans, '*Do you like beans*?' Why do they have to like beans?
>
> **Blanca**: (...) what if they don't like them... maybe they'll never like beans. I also believe you have to contextualise though... if it's a child that maybe the financial conditions in his home are not... and the nursery food is probably the only meal he'll have during the day...
>
> **Ida**: then you have to worry...
>
> **Blanca**: then I could compromise, but you can't invade that child...
>
> **Ida**: yes, you can't force them...
>
> **Blanca**: with the fixation that you have, which is your purpose, YOUR purpose is, for them to eat all that food, because someone is watching you, and it's watching that YOUR child, who's under YOUR care, is not going to eat that food (breathes in) I think it's with these things that you learn, you see, you compromise, depending on the particular situation (...) with those children...
>
> **Ida**: you *[experience]*[45] it, yes (...) *'Why are they like this? Why do they want that?'* (...) there's no definition-- we can say though, I can say, from my conviction, that he is a subject of law, and has the right to eat, the right to have the minimum conditions (**Blanca**: basic) basic *[conditions]* sorted out, and that's our responsibility, not his, it's ours (breathes in) but we also must have a different

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[44] For all the quotes, parenthetical ellipses indicate when I have cut the quote, while ellipses without parenthesis signal a pause in the speech of the person quoted.

[45] Italicised square brackets indicate when I have modified or inserted a word (e.g. grammatical person, verb conjugation, adverb, etc.) for reasons of coherence. As verb ellipses are quite prevalent in Spanish, I often inserted omitted verbs to facilitate comprehension.

[kind] of respect towards him, and it has to do with this, with his needs, with his interests with his… meanings, with his culture *[especially]* now that we have uh so many um foreign children (…)

Eva: it is very complex because, I was listening to you (talking to Ida and Blanca) now and yes, it is true (…) the child is a subject of law, but there are things that… there are children who have their preferences, they come from different places and one has to respect that, but you also have to worry about their basic needs. And what you (talking to Ida and Blanca) said about, '*if they don't like it, they just don't like it…*' many times you can't do that because (**Ida**: right) you have to teach them (**Ida**: exactly, exactly) I mean, maybe not teach them… but, but help them (**Ida**: yes) uh, little by little, without being too pushy but yes… to try to make them learn… because it has to do with their physical integrity as well, not because someone is watching me, demanding from me an empty *[food]* tray, I'm thinking of a very domestic thing which is school meals

Ida: but it isn't just a domestic thing, I think nutrition is fundamental

Eva: it sure is (**Ida**: right right) and you worry about this (…) many times children at their homes they don't have (…) they don´t want to eat just because they do not want to, because they don't like it, because… they are used to their mom preparing for them, I do not know… sausages and chips every day, and that's a reality (**Blanca**: yes of course) and on that regard I…

Ida: you have to worry (**Eva**: yes) and take care of (**Eva**: on that regard I…) to worry and to take care of

Eva: I don't… I just don't care about other things because, I have to be in charge of it! You know what I mean? (**Ida**: yes) I think that yes, there are many things we didn't consider before (breathes in) and we used to make decisions for the child, and did everything we were told, but there are issues that are… as adults we have to take charge of because… they are not going to do it (laughs) let's say, I mean, yes… you can compromise on certain things but with this you have to be more drastic (**Blanca**: yes) at least I am (**Blanca**: I think that) maybe I'm old-fashioned, outdated (**Blanca**: no…) I still haven´t evolved…

Blanca: No, but, that's why I think you have to be very subtle (**Ida**: exactly) to be very subtle (**Eva**: yes of course) and compromise, and, and I think it has to do with the fact that every child, each reality… every child is different…

Ida: (…) and what you said (talking to Eva) is so true, to be in charge, we as adults have to take charge of it! (**Eva**: clearly) According to the context, yes, but we must take charge

Blanca: if I am talking about each child being an individual (…) I can't say '*ok youngsters*', I have only vulnerable children, '*you all must eat all the food*'…

Ida: and everyone must-- and no one can stand up

Blanca: and no one can stand up until…

Ida: if they don't eat the food…

Blanca: exactly, I mean, my banner that I have stuck here (points at her forehead) of children primacy… and individual differences… it'll just fall

Ida: but we do have to take charge

Blanca: exactly

Eva: mmm

Blanca: yes, that's what we are for.

1.2 A first glimpse

As abovementioned, this dialogue took place in the second group session, in which participants free-associated around the word 'child'. The first exchanges during the session revolved around the impossibility of defining the child, while immediately before this incident Ida had introduced the issue of *adultism*, understood - from the group's perspective - as conceiving children and childhood from an adult point of view. I will now unpack the extract, requoting specific segments when relevant.

Ida starts the discussion questioning the expectation for children to eat or like certain foods. Blanca promptly continues Ida's rhetorical question; 'Why do they have to like beans?' (Ida) '(...) maybe they'll never like beans' (Blanca). Blanca qualifies her stance immediately after, '(...) you have to contextualise though', pointing out there might be cases in which nursery food is the only food a child will have; Ida readily agrees. Blanca then continues to advance their (Ida and Blanca's) shared reasoning:

> **Blanca**: then I could compromise, but you can't <u>invade</u>[46] that child...
> **Ida**: yes, you can't <u>force</u> them...
> **Blanca**: with the <u>fixation</u> that you have, which is your purpose, YOUR purpose is, for them to eat all that food, because <u>someone is watching you</u>, and it's watching that YOUR child, who's under YOUR care, is not going to eat that food (breathes in) I think it's with these things that you learn, you see, you compromise, depending on the particular situation (...) with those children...

The strength of Blanca and Ida's assertions escalates rather quickly; making children eat could entail *invading* and *forcing* them to do so. Then Blanca brings to the table a different set of underlying motivations for making children 'eat all that food'; turning children's eating into a personal goal, mostly out of subjugation to *someone*, an unspecified vigilance. Being held accountable for children's eating could turn the matter into a *fixation* for educators, seemingly understood by Blanca as an obsessive determination to comply with an imposition. Finalising her utterance, Blanca suggests that being faced with decision-making around moral dilemmas could bring professional growth to educators, in a moral reasoning sort of sense, 'it's with these things that you learn'.

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[46] Underlined parts of the quotations signal words or phrases that were central to the interpretations of the material I chose to make in my analysis.

In what follows, Ida resumes the idea of the impossibility of defining children, beyond considering them subjects of law[47]:

> **Ida**: you *[experience]* it yes (…) *'Why are they like this? Why do they want that?'* (…) there's no definition-- we can say though, I can say, from my <u>conviction</u>, that he is a <u>subject of law</u>, and has the right to eat, the right to have the minimum conditions (**Blanca**: basic) basic *[conditions]* sorted out, and that's our responsibility, not his, it's ours (inspire) <u>but</u> we also must have a <u>different *[kind]* of respect</u> towards him, and it has to do with this, with <u>his needs, with his interests with his… meanings</u>, with his culture *[especially]* now that we have uh so many um <u>foreign</u> children (…)

Ida's assertion of the child as a subject of law stems from her *conviction*; seemingly more an affective investment in a firm belief, than the mere affirmation of a legally ratified status. It is worth noting that the term *Subject of law* constitutes a core notion in the definition of the child in the Chilean EC education curriculum. Here - as in other instances during the sessions - the term was uttered without further elaboration, seeming to represent to the educators the acknowledgement of children's quality of being equal in rights and dignity to every person.

Immediately after this Ida refocuses attention on children's active agency, as seen in their distinctive *needs*, *interests* and *meanings*. An ethical imperative seems to emerge here as well, 'but we also must have a different [kind] of respect towards him (…)', the 'but' and the 'also' hinting that something of a different order - beyond securing children's rights - might be at play. For instance, the challenge to establish a relationship to a racialized *other*, maybe the new *foreign* childhood that is starting to populate Chilean EC classrooms. This is the last exchange in which Ida seems to register the potential tensions between guaranteeing children's nutrition and treating them as completely agentic subjects in every aspect.

Soon after, Eva intervenes in the discussion for the first time, acknowledging the 'subject of law' and the 'children's active agency' arguments while putting the fulfilment of children's basic needs at the centre. Then, she openly expresses her disagreement with an undisputed acceptance of children's dislike of certain foods:

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[47] *Subject* of law/rights: formal status given to the child (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) as opposed to treating children as an *object* of law; that is, as being without capacity, in need of protection, and having no rights.

> **Eva**: (…) <u>what you said</u> (talking to Ida and Blanca) about, '*if they don't like it, they just don't like it…*' many times <u>you can't do that</u> because (**Ida**: right) you have to teach them (**Ida**: exactly, exactly) I mean, maybe not teach them… but, but help them (**Ida**: yes) uh, <u>little by little</u>, <u>without being too pushy</u> but yes… to try to make them learn… because it has to do with their physical integrity as well, <u>not because someone is watching me</u>, demanding from me an <u>empty *[food]* tray</u>, I'm thinking of a very <u>domestic</u> thing which is school meals
>
> **Ida:** but it isn't just a domestic thing, I think nutrition is fundamental

Beyond a matter of disagreement, sustaining Ida and Blanca's perspective is not something that Eva can do. As Eva continues to develop her point, she seems to answer specific elements of Blanca's assertions; helping children *little by little*, as opposed to *invading* them; not being *too pushy*, in order not to *force* them. Replying in an explicit manner now, Eva states that hers is a concern that does not stem from compliance, 'because someone is watching me', nor from submission to being held accountable, of having to show an *empty tray*. Characterising children's feeding as belonging to the domestic realm seems to highlight its concrete, quotidian, non-negotiable character, thus rendering any attempt from external regulation impertinent and futile.

Ida articulates agreement with Eva's point of view, 'exactly, exactly'. Interjected approving comments like this often seemed to constitute filling words or, arguably, to serve the purpose of qualifying in advance participants' further claims, somehow giving them more credibility after having considered other perspectives. In both cases, a certain tokenism seemed to be at play. In this case though, Ida confirms her support to Eva's point, deeming nutrition to be *fundamental*. Eva continues to reassert her perspective, further stating - in a slightly dismissive way - that she 'just [doesn't] care' about any other consideration:

> **Eva**: I don't… <u>I just don't care</u> about other things because, I have to be in charge of it! You know what I mean? (**Ida**: yes) I think that yes, there are many things we didn't consider before (breathes in) and <u>we used to make decisions for the child, and did everything we were told</u>, but there are issues that are… as adults we have to take charge of because… they are not going to do it (<u>laughs</u>) let's say, I mean, yes… you can compromise on certain things but with this <u>you have to be more drastic</u> (**Blanca**: yes) <u>at least I am</u> (**Blanca**: I think that) maybe <u>I'm old-fashioned, outdated</u> (**Blanca**: no…) <u>I still haven´t evolved…</u>

Eva's need to address her groupmates directly increases ('you know what I mean?') while she concedes that educators have, in fact, behaved to date in an indoctrinated way: '[we] did everything we were told'. She laughs, seemingly astounded by the fact of even having to make the point she is making. Eva's determination gets closer to absolute, '(…) you have to be more drastic, at least I am'. Jokingly, yet not without a certain irony, Eva admits how her perspective might make her an *old-fashioned*,

outdated, *yet-to-evolve* educator. Blanca's response to Eva's 'self-deprecating' comment seems to aim at consensus at first, yet Blanca immediately begins to row in the opposite direction, resuming her advancement of the children's *distinctiveness* argument:

> **Blanca**: No, but, that's why I think you have to be very subtle (**Ida**: exactly) to be very subtle (**Eva**: yes of course) and compromise, and, and I think it has to do with the fact that every child, each reality... every child is different...
> **Ida**: (...) and what you said (talking to Eva) is so true, to be in charge, we as adults have to take charge of it! (**Eva**: clearly) According to the context, yes, but we must take charge

Ida's response to this exchange is to ally herself to Eva's position, 'what you said is so true'. It is worth noting Ida's utterance starts with an 'and', seemingly ignoring, or wanting to ignore, the potentially adversarial relation between Blanca and Eva's contrasting perspectives. Blanca then continues to develop her progressively firmer determination not to make children 'eat all the food':

> **Blanca**: if I am talking about each child being an individual (...) I can't say *'ok youngsters'*, I have only vulnerable children, *'you all must eat all the food'* ...
> **Ida**: and everyone must-- and no one can stand up
> **Blanca**: and no one can stand up until...
> **Ida**: if they don't eat the food...

Blanca turns the matter into an ethical issue: by demanding that children eat, educators fail to act in accordance with their belief in the importance of respecting children's active agency and diversity. Her refusal to use the notion of vulnerable[48] children as criteria to inform decisions on children's eating further supports her point. The compelling nature of Blanca's discourse can be seen in Ida's urge to complete Blanca's phrases in a somewhat caricatured depiction of prohibiting children from standing up until they have eaten all their food. From a projective identification perspective (developed further in the discussion section below), it can be argued that Blanca's discourse was vigorously projected onto Ida an Eva, often having the effect of being adopted by the recipient. Blanca's final remark is phrased in a slightly condemning way:

> **Blanca**: exactly, I mean, my banner that I have stuck here (points at her forehead) of children primacy... and individual differences... it'll just fall

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[48] As previously explained, the notion of *vulnerable children* is an official category of Chile's school system (*priority student* is the term used in the present), defined according to the socioeconomic characterisation of children's homes.

The image of a demonstrator whose protest sign, the 'banner stuck to her forehead', ultimately falls, points to the hypocrisy and lack of professional integrity that Blanca sees in claiming to a adhere to a principled view of the child, while engaging in non-negotiable interactions with children like making them eat. Ida starts to end the dialogue, agreeing again with Eva's uncompromising stance:

> **Ida**: but we <u>do have to take charge</u>
> **Blanca**: exactly
> **Eva**: mmm
> **Blanca**: yes, <u>that's what we are for</u>

Blanca asserts 'exactly', disregarding, as Ida did above, the extent to which 'taking charge' may go against her perspective. Eva simply says 'mmm', possibly conveying how dissatisfied and unconvinced she is by the way the dialogue is about to end, while also showing how difficult it might be for her to respond to the intense and performative discourse she was faced with. Blanca ambiguously wraps up the incident with 'that's what we are for', a hard to interpret remark when considering in full the discussion that had transpired.

1.3 Adding some layers

In this section I consider in greater detail the educators' engagement with the discourses of other participants, whose acknowledgement may have had the primary function of validating participants' own, often uncompromising, comments. I locate their discussion about feeding children in the realm of ethical judgements, pointing out how certain position-takings may have threatened participants identities as 'progressive' educators, and argue that Ida's ambivalent engagement in the discussion may have had the crucial function of sustaining it. The fact that the reported incident took place during the first 15 minutes of the group's second session may indicate an early developed capacity to engage in a profound and provocative dialogue based on principled views on the child. This discussion ultimately underpinned statements about what a good educators' practice should look like.

As previously outlined, participants did qualify their claims and frequently acknowledged others' points of view. It can be argued, however, that they did this only in an abstract way, without seeming to think through the implications of these concessions. This was not even possible for Ida, whose fluid circulation between her groupmates' contrasting discourses could have given her the opportunity to engage more flexibly with them and consider their potential implications and applications.

Both Blanca and Eva's positions can be seen as uncompromising and not always very feasible: Is it possible to cater for children's food preferences in a culturally respectful way, given the material constraints that state-funded settings often face? To what extent it is plausible to make sure children eat all their food in the context of a daily routine that must continue beyond lunch time? It is worth noting that, although all the participants worked in areas that were struggling financially, material conditions were virtually never discussed in this group. This was not the case in the morning group which was consistently preoccupied with this aspect of daily life.

Revisiting specific moments in the dialogue: Blanca's depiction of an educator who is 'fixated' with children's eating as a result of submission and compliance, could be described as an oversimplification that introduced a certain tension in the discussion, while entailing a certain offensiveness. The 'fixated' educator's practice seems to mirror a practice rooted in fear, whose only possible resulting subjectivity is that of a non-reflective educator. For Blanca, her *fixation theory* - with its inherent lack of reflexivity - constituted the only possible basis on which an educator could emphasise children's eating. This type of unyielding discursive node seemed to augment the power and reach of Blanca's assertions.

However, deciding to make children eat food could also be seen as the result of an ethical decision-making process. It could even constitute a decision that is more difficult to make as it requires defying idealised views on what a good educator should do. For this group, it was very important to be perceived as reflective, progressive educators. This may have made difficult for Eva to defend her unpopular, scarcely progressive position. However, she chose to sustain her open defiance to this idealised vision, 'you have to be more drastic, at least I am.'

As previously outlined, Ida was able to navigate quite freely between both discursive positions: the 'children's active agency', and the 'children's nutrition' argument. Regardless of being a discussion Ida triggered herself, it looks as if she avoided any sort of fixed position taking. While appearing at the beginning to acknowledge the underlying tension, she then seemed to progressively distance herself from making the tension explicit. It can be argued that Ida's shifting position not only protected her from the polarisation of the dialogue, but also had the very effect of sustaining it. Otherwise, a very short exchange could have taken place, in which the contrasting visions somehow cancelled each other, without enabling any communication.

In sum, the educators' responses to this debate were far from obvious; their investments in the dialogue suggest they did not experience it only as an exchange of their perspectives on a care issue. Instead, it seems there was a subjective positioning at play, as seen in Eva and Blanca's active efforts to delineate particular professional identities, and Ida's apparent attempt to shorten the distance between these position-takings.

2. Discussion on projective identification and its emergence in the group

Projective identification can be understood as an omnipotent unconscious fantasy, which affects the relationships between parts of the self[49] and internal and external objects. In order to better grasp the concept, it is worth to briefly look at the notion of the internal object. These can be defined as a mental and emotional image of an external object that has been taken inside the self (Klein, 1935). As Heimann (1949) explains, internal objects can be seen as the doubles of the objects the self has contact with in the outer world. Klein (1935) states that internal objects are constantly shaped by processes of projection and introjection - which underlie the process of identification - thus making it difficult to separate its definition from the very notion of projective identification. Here it might be useful to draw an initial distinction between 'plain' introjection, by which the internalised object can be kept apart from the self; and identification, which supposes an alteration of the self-representation of the recipient (Sandler, 1988; in Lapping, 2011).

Briefly expanding on introjection as the key mechanism of object formation, Heimann (1949) identifies the origin of introjection in the infant's aim at satisfying their instinctual impulses -both libidinal and destructive - by incorporating external objects, prototypically the mother, and/or part-objects like the mother's body, body parts or organs. Heimann further points out that internal objects can represent the child itself through the animation and personalisation of their impulses. In concordance with Heimann's observation that introjection is not restricted to infantile life, Segal (1957) asserts that the first projections and identifications in the infant will constitute the beginning of the process of symbol formation; changing in adult life the nature of the

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[49] In psychoanalytic language, self can be defined - in simple terms - as one's own person as opposed to the object. There is also a relevant distinction between the terms self and ego, being the latter a mental system that constitutes a substructure of the self's personality, along with the id and the superego (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973).

introjected objects from persons - and/or partial aspects of them - to ideas and other abstract formations.

A more contemporary Kleinian take[50] on projective identification defines it as an unconscious fantasy in which aspects of the self or an internal object - perceived to be good or bad - are split off and attributed to an external object. Projective identification may be accompanied by unconscious activity aimed at inducing the recipient of the projection to feel and act in accordance with the projective fantasy, while it can also have *acquisitive* properties. That is, beyond its function of getting rid of aspects of self, projective identification can also serve the purpose of entering the mind of the recipient, to acquire desired aspects of the recipient's self. This exemplifies how projective and introjective phantasies often operate together (Klein, 1946).

From a group analysis perspective, Bion (1961; in Szykierski, 2014) described projective identification as an unconscious form of group communication by which the diverse phantasies stimulated by the group format are transmitted between participants. Similarly highlighting its function as a mode of intersubjective communication, Lapping (2011) discerns three main uses of projective identification: to get rid of painful unwanted parts of the self; to project parts of the self onto the other, in order to dominate it and foster a feeling of sameness; and to take over the other's capacities, thus constructing an identity from the other. For Lapping, all three expressions may ultimately reflect a refusal of the separateness inherent to object relations, and its concomitant pain. This claim is supported by Ogden (2004), who asserts that the transformation of the subjectivity of the projector and the recipient - brought about by projective identification - operates by means of the negation of the limits between both subjectivities.

Drawing on these conceptual tools to enrich the reading of what took place within the group, a possible understanding of Ida's engagement in the discussion is to see her as projecting - onto both Eva and Blanca's perspectives - split elements of the way she sees her own practice, and/or split elements of her idealised image of the good educator. Keeping these split, conflicting parts on the outside of her internal world - i.e. in external reality and comfortably separated - may have helped Ida to feel more comfortable with its ambivalent relationship.

Returning to the last moments of the incident, right before the end of the dialogue an arguably even more tense moment than the 'fixation' discussion took place: Blanca's

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[50] For more details see http://www.melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/projective-identification

introduction of the metaphor of the *fallen banner*, signifying the lack of integrity inherent in claiming to adhere to one set of values while acting in ways that are inconsistent. It could be argued that the intensity of this comment is what brought the dialogue to an unsought end, as seen in Eva's silence and Ida's strange remark, echoing Eva's 'we have to take charge'.

It is possible that Eva took the role of receiving Blanca's projected, deplored unideal elements, allowing Blanca to keep them distinct from her constructed 'flawless' discourse on EC education. If this was the case, Eva may have experienced this projection from Blanca as an overwhelming attack, to which was difficult to respond immediately. This may be seen in how Eva did not reply - that is, did not defend herself - immediately after. Whatever the reason why Eva did not say something at that moment, because she chose not to or felt unable to do so, it can be argued this predicament stayed with her for some of the session, as can be seen next.

2.1 A short postscript

Eva seems to have continued elaborating the feelings that the 'beans' incident may had elicited in her; giving them expression later in the session in a self-reflective observation about her practice and positionality as educator:

> **Eva:** I have a lot of years in the classroom, with its demands and different realities, and I don't say this with hopelessness, things are just different. And, of course, I'm also an evolving being in relation to how I work with my children, and the people with whom I... relate... maybe I'm more... more avant-garde *[than them]* but (laughs) but the truth is that maybe I'm not that much... according to what I hear from you (talking to Ida and Blanca), maybe not so much...

Eva starts, in a self-affirming way, pointing out her vast classroom experience (she has worked in the classroom for 27 years). She then continues to mention 'how things are just different', referring to an important and recurring theme for her, the different 'EC educations' that take place in kindergartens versus school-based settings[51]. Eva works - and has always worked - in a school, a work-setting unanimously seen by the *noon* group as less than ideal, mainly given its schoolifying effect on EC practice. By stating how different school-based practice is, Eva seems to rationalise how challenging it can be to construct herself subjectively as an educator in this context. Denying the *hopelessness* with which she experiences this, may in fact signal it. Eva asserts that she is an *evolving being* in relation to her work, which may function as an explanation for her groupmates and to herself of the discontinuities - even contradictions - that can be

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[51] This topic will be explored in more detail in the first Thematic discussion.

found throughout her practice. She then shares her former self-perception of being an avant-gardist educator - in comparison to her colleagues at her EC setting - yet immediately disconfirming it with a laughter, and finally disclosing how the group has challenged this self-perception, 'maybe I'm not that much... according to what I hear from you'. Immediately after this comment, Ida came to Eva's rescue:

> **Ida:** What happens is that they *[kindergartens and school-based settings]* are different systems (**Eva**: of course they are) I mean, working in a kindergarten versus a school is different, because the school *[system]* forces you to look at things differently (**Eva**: clearly that's *[the reason]* why)

This exchange continued for a while with Ida, for the most part, supporting the idea of how different, challenging and difficult things are in school-based EC settings. To summarise Eva's experience of the 'beans' incident - considering both the discussion itself and this brief ex-post reflection - she appears to want to defend herself at different moments (despite not always succeeding) from the intensity of the 'children's active agency' discourse. She seems to distance herself from this discourse at times by laughing, even ironizing a little, while at other times she strongly articulates her stance. It is possible to confirm that this incident had a significant impact on Eva's experience of the group, generating a certain affective resonance that was still present in her one year later, as can be seen in the next section.

2.2 The 'beans' incident in hindsight

As previously mentioned, a series of individual follow-up interviews were conducted around a year after the group sessions took place. The interviews sought to explore what participants remembered about the group sessions, both in terms of their experience of participating in the group, and the main topics that were discussed. Participants were also asked to remember, if possible, particularly positive and negative feelings, perceptions and memories in relation to both aspects. The purpose of the interviews was to learn about the elements that made an impression on participants, and to what extent some of their views may have changed a year later. The four members of this group agreed to participate in these interviews.

Eva was the only participant who took part in the 'beans' incident who recalled it during the follow-up interview. She did so when I asked if there were any negative aspects of the group experience she remembered. She did not make explicit reference to the incident at first, instead vaguely evoking an unpleasant feeling of being overwhelmed by a strongly projected discourse about EC practice:

> **Eva:** (...) there was a day in which <u>I left a little disgusted</u> (laughs) because of feeling <u>it was too much</u>, I mean, ok, it's fine, they are different levels uh, *'you do things one way, and <u>we</u> do them another way'*, but... I felt it was... <u>almost on the verge of fanaticism</u>, I mean, <u>criticism, not fanaticism</u>, just too much criticism, I don't remember what was it about, but <u>I remember the feeling</u>

Firstly, Eva described an unprocessed, unspecified feeling of being disgusted by something that was 'too much'. Then, just like before, she posed the notion of difference between the kindergarten and the school level as a rationalising element that might explain the distance between her and the overwhelming discourse. This time this difference is framed in terms of two opposite positionings, 'you' and 'we'. 'You' referred to Ida and Blanca, the kindergarten educators; versus 'we', Eva, the 'school' educator, presumably joined by her workmates, or maybe school-based EC educators more generally, or even school-based EC practice as a whole. It bears noting that Eva never identified with school-based EC education during the group sessions. On the contrary, she presented herself as greatly dissenting from the school-based settings ethos, a practice that seemed to embody - for the whole group - everything that is wrong about EC education. Ultimately, Eva does not seem to succeed at warding off what she experiences as an expression of fanaticism. Despite Eva's quick attempt to downplay fanaticism, from a projective identification angle, persecutory elements of Blanca's discourse - 'just too much criticism' - were still felt one year later by Eva, in an arguably isolating way. Likewise, Eva's persecutory experience of Blanca's overwhelming discourse may also comprise projected elements of her own disapproving judgement on - perhaps including her own - school-based practice. Unpacking her feelings may have helped Eva to remember what they were triggered by:

> **Eva:** (...) I think it was about food... because <u>they</u> (Ida and Blanca) said *'yes, the child has a right to not wanting to eat something if they don't like it... why do we have to force them?'*, and I said *'I don't compromise on that'*, so I remember <u>them</u> being way too relaxed about that, just letting them be... and that's *fine*, yes, I understand, but when it comes to basic needs, maybe I'm more old-fashioned, so <u>I was a little shocked</u>, I left with <u>a feeling of *'ggrrrr'*</u> (growls), like <u>*'urghh'*</u> (laughs)

What had made Eva feel disgusted, perhaps as if having had eaten some spoiled food, was the 'beans' incident, and the polarised position-taking it demanded from her; having to single-handedly defy Ida and Blanca's principled beliefs in respecting children's preferences which left her feeling 'shocked' and plainly 'ggrrrr'. As seen in this extract, and throughout the rest of her follow-up interview, Eva perceived Ida and Blanca as forming a coalition which often advocated for extreme views on children's

agency and, subsequently, on EC practice. Delia, the young educator, was in turn, described by Eva as having a more flexible view, because of having 'just started' and thus being able to 'consider [things] from different perspectives'. Interestingly, Eva does not seem to remember Ida's more flexible engagement in the 'beans' dialogue, and to many other exchanges during the group sessions. This forgetfulness might be explained because it might have been difficult to process the extent of some of the projective exchanges that took place and the intense emotional mobilisation they probably evoked in her. It could also be argued that vacillating perspectives, like the ones Ida often adopted, were frequently subsumed by bigger, often projective and largely impenetrable discourses, such as Blanca's.

In what follows, I briefly describe two glimpses of Ida and Blanca's recall of their engagement with the discourse of the group during their follow-up interviews. Despite them not making explicit reference to the 'beans' incident, it might be interesting to look at these extracts in the light of that dialogue. Blanca made the following comment about Eva's participation in the group sessions:

> **Blanca:** it happened to me sometimes... I don't remember the name of this girl, Eva? It seems to me that she was <u>a person who was very structured</u> (...) that <u>made me a little anxious</u>, that position of <u>not compromising</u>, not giving in, some of the <u>things we put on the table</u>, which we could realise <u>were indeed possible</u>, you may have to break some structures uh, maybe it's not going to be so easy, but we were there saying *'it is possible'*... and <u>she didn't</u>... there <u>wasn't a lot of</u>... <u>will to change</u>

The tension, identified by Blanca, between 'we', that is, 'the noon group', and Eva, may be seen as a crucial narrative into which intense exchanges like the 'beans' incident were distilled. Blanca's direct focus on Eva's personal characteristics - 'a person who was very structured'- and the elicited emotional response -which 'made [her] a little anxious' - seem to show how, for Blanca, Eva personified the discursive positioning Blanca wanted to dismiss. In this way, Eva acted as a recipient of Blanca's unwanted elements, those elements which could potentially flaw her tightly-knit discourse. As on other occasions, Blanca brought the dissension to an ethical level, associating the adoption of a more structured approach with an unwillingness to change.

In this last extract it can be seen how Ida, not only does not mention the beans incident, but even more, evokes a pleasant feeling of affinity and concordance. She does not refer at any point, to the very different views that were often confronted during the group sessions:

> **Ida:** <u>we were all</u> like, in the attitude of foregrounding EC education, its importance, <u>in this fight</u> (...) the different points of view, which were <u>very concordant</u>, at some point (...) in spite of us being a super <u>diverse group</u>... with, with very <u>strong personalities</u>, because <u>each one had her own strong opinion and defended it</u> (...) I think <u>we concurred in the same EC education</u>, an EC education with the same purpose

Ida speaks of the group as a 'we'; a group that in spite of its diversity and outspokenness, convened in collegiality around the shared goal of 'foregrounding EC education'. This could constitute an idealised view of a group that succeeded in reaching a profound consensus - 'to concur in the same EC education' - in a largely meritorious way given the strong opinions from which agreement had to grow. Ida's obliviousness to the group's tensions, polarisations and disagreements may reveal a use of projective identification, through which the difficulty of integrating some of the disparate elements of the group's discourse is denied. This kind of mechanism seems to be instrumental in the creation of a satisfactory, apparently cohesive educator subjectivity, thus offering a desirable position to identify with. In this sense, Ida's use of projective identification also exhibited an acquisitive quality; that is, projective identification which does not only aim at getting rid of split elements, but also to absorb an idealised - yet comfortably separate - view of the educator, both from Eva and Blanca. The above seems to have helped Ida to avoid facing the challenging, potentially painful task of integrating these idealised views; painful in that such integration may never be completely possible.

3. Conclusions

3.1 Summary

Blanca, Eva and Ida illustrated different engagements with the discourse of the group, in terms of their contribution to its construction and their subjective experience of it. As seen in the follow up interviews, Blanca's discourse on children's agency and how to embrace it with professional integrity, seems to have remained hegemonic one year later. On the other hand, Eva and Ida seemed to not recall crucial aspects of these exchanges that had taken place one year earlier, either in relation to the support given to certain points of view by other participants, or the marked disagreement that emerged in some of the sessions.

Blanca's persuasive argument may have constituted an intense projection with a clear controlling effect on the other participants, thus being inevitably introjected by them: ambivalently in the case of Ida, and in a persecutory manner in the case of Eva. From her account in the follow up interview, it is possible to suggest that Eva was left

affectively shaken by this incident, harbouring feelings of isolation as a product of the polarisation resulting from the projection of the group's discourse and its subsequent persecutory effects. Eva's persecutory experience of Blanca's discourse may have also been fed, to a large extent, by Eva's own strong criticism of a school-based practice, and of her own positioning in it. This doubly persecutory experience, among other things, may have prevented Eva remembering containing elements of the group experience, such as Ida's frequent expressions of solidarity during the sessions. Concurrently, Ida's obliviousness to the group's tensions, polarisation and disagreements seems to indicate a use of projective identification with acquisitive properties, with the primary gain of keeping apart identitary elements that are difficult to integrate, in order to create a satisfactory EC educator identity.

3.2 Concluding reflections

This chapter has analysed an instance of the emergence of the free-associative discourse produced by three EC educators in relation to ethico-practical aspects of their practice. Their contrasting and shifting positionings, both in relation to the group and the emergent discourses, were explored.

My detailed analysis of an affectively intense discussion among the EC educators has allowed me to show how their everyday practice supposes complex decision-taking, denoting the necessity for them to constantly exercise professional judgement, no matter how 'practical' the subject of decision might be. In agreement with understandings of care in EC education as an ethical practice, the educators were aware of the ethical dilemma inherent to taking a position regarding their role in safeguarding children's nutrition. As a result of this, they gave indications of feeling subjectively interpellated into the development of rigorous and coherent professional identities to which professional conceptions of children as agentic subjects seemed crucial. Simultaneously they also indicated how certain contexts of practice - like school-based settings and their proneness to schoolification - made it particularly challenging for them to construct themselves as EC education subjects.

The challenging, at times paradoxical and, ultimately, impossible aspects of the interpellation to become a coherent professional subject became evident in the affective mobilisation that characterised the educators' exchanges. This was most notable during their sometimes intensive, unconscious use of projective identification. As summarised above, the use of projective identification, by means of the transitory blurring of boundaries between subjectivities, allowed the educators to secure - at least

temporarily - a 'satisfactory' professional self-image helping them keep apart contradictory or conflictive aspects of their identities thereby eluding the fact that integrating some of these aspects may never be completely possible. Notably, it allowed them to rationalise painful aspects of their practice and disavow undesired aspects of their professional subjectivities. In this way, the professional subjectivation of EC educators is not a purely technical or intellectual endeavour; it entails marked affective aspects. The analysis developed in the chapter suggests that the group format that framed educators' interactions may have intensified their feeling that a coherent account of their professional selves was being demanded, both through their relations to the professional others in the group, and their experience of their own self expectations in that setting. The use of the concept of projective identification in the analysis helped to explain some of these interactions, suggesting they may be understood as the deployment of an unconscious mechanism to defend against this potentially overwhelming demand. This close analysis extends previous conceptualisations of projective identification, underlining its potential as an analytic tool to make sense of complex professional subjectivation processes. It also extends theorisations of professional subjectivities to suggest how they are constituted within these complex, unconscious affective dynamics.

Regarding the data production methodology, the group free-associative interviews proved to be a promising method for exploring the production of intricate professional subjectivities. A profound discussion on EC practice emerged quite early during the group process and was easily resumed from session to session, allowing the educators to articulate and problematise their multiple professional discourses on EC education. In this sense, it can be hypothesised that the educators kept free-associating in between sessions, giving continuity to the work undertaken during the free-associative interviews. There are several reasons why particular contents may have stayed in the participants' minds demanding further psychical work. For instance, there is some indication that contents that were considered unacceptable (and had therefore previously been dismissed) may have found expression in further sessions as a result of the mobilisation of affect by some of their associated signifiers and the concomitant destabilisation of different repressions that had been at work. Within a psychoanalytic framework, this discursive shift in relation to specific unconscious contents might be interpreted as evidence of an internalised capacity to continue processing them; a capacity that, in this case, and evidenced by their rich recollection and further

reflection on the group discussions during the follow up interviews, seemed to still be present in the educators almost a year later.

Already during the group sessions, the free-associative interviews arguably exhibited a transformative subjectifying potential; transformative in that the opportunity for educators to see their professional selves through others' eyes seemed to stimulate a shift in the position from which they constructed their professional narratives. For instance, by questioning the extent to which they could continue seeing themselves as avant-gardist educators.

Finally, it is worth noting the way the group discussions experimented with new ways of producing free associations. For example, the use of the notion of the 'child' as a starting point for the group discussions succeeded in stimulating the educators' exploration of their professional subjectivities, as seen in the prompt initiation of discussions on their practice and professional identities in each session. Starting from a discrete signifier like 'child', obviously related to the realm of EC education, nevertheless proved to be enigmatic and open enough to stimulate myriad free associations in the educators; more or less proximate to their concrete experience of EC practice, yet always indicative of their unconscious and affective investments in the profession. Both exploring and conveying their representations of the child and giving an account of their relation to children in their everyday practice seemed to facilitate educators' awareness of the multiple position-takings their professional exercise demands from them, ultimately allowing them to glimpse how these positionings inform their professional self-image and further subjectivation processes. This offers a methodological insight about the way it is possible to use prompts to elicit free associative material that reveals both tensions in professional subjectivities and the unconscious dynamics that emerge in response to these tensions.

THEMATIC DISCUSSION: The subjectifying effects of school-based EC practice

Introduction

This is the first of three brief pieces I include after each analysis chapter in which I provide a concise, exploratory thematic analysis of the key topics that animated participants' affectively-laden discussions in the analysed sessions. Through these thematic discussions, I aim to acknowledge that the emotionally invested exchanges that are the subject of my analysis chapters took place in the context of ongoing discussions on substantive topics throughout the interview sessions. In this sense, it can be argued that the analysed exchanges are, to some extent, the product of a build-up of unconscious affect around these topics.

In what follows, I consider the different identitary challenges set by school-based and kindergarten-based EC education, a theme that participants constantly came back to during the interviews and that significantly underlay the noon group's discussion on the role of EC educators in the safeguarding of children's nutrition, addressed above.

The educators identified a clear tension between school-based and kindergarten-based EC practice and asserted that kindergartens provide a better EC education, while schools offer a very adverse context of practice. I argue that this conception, while seeming to univocally support the emergence of a shared professional identity, may have had the indirect effect of fragmentating this identity. In order to develop this argument, in the first section of this discussion I illustrate the way participants characterised some of the perceived differences between the two types of settings and the way they drew on apparently contradictory discourses within EC education to construct a position of resistance in relation to the hegemonizing effect of schools. I then go on to discuss, in the second section, how this cohesive resistance seems to be destabilised in the figure of the school-based EC educator, whose adherence to the EC education ethos is ultimately questioned. This problematises suggestions in the literature about educators developing a unified professional identity as a product of a fairly homogeneous experience of belonging to the EC workforce.

The perils of school-based practice: resisting schoolification

In this section, I illustrate the participants' view of schoolification as a threat inevitably inherent to school-based practice, and some indications of the development of a resistance against its perceived pervasive effect.

Throughout the interview sessions, the educators expressed their view that the EC 'educations' that take place in kindergartens and schools are utterly different. From their perspective, regardless of catering for the same children, both types of EC practice are completely disconnected from each other and often exhibit conflicting expectations of the work implemented in the other setting:

> The differences in EC education, between what happens in kindergartens and in schools, they seem to be two different worlds that don't dialogue with each other, even though it's true that we are the same educational level, we should have the same interests, make the same emphases *[yet]* they seem to fade (...) (**Ida**, follow up interview)

The literature has found that some EC educators think it is better to practice in school-based settings than in kindergartens as schools offer a more professionalising environment which allows practitioners to de-emphasise the care aspect of the profession (Gibson, 2013). Contrarily, the participants of this study seemed to share the underlying presupposition that kindergarten-based EC education is better than that imparted in schools, thus setting the standard of what *proper* EC practice should look like. This idealised notion seemed to go hand in hand with a perception of bearing exclusive knowledge about the child to which schools have no access. However, in participants' views, the demands of the school level - with its high accountability pressures and proneness to schoolification (Brooks & Murray, 2016) - frequently overpower the aims of EC education, making it very difficult for EC educators to practice in school-based settings. A critical consequence of the miscommunication between these 'two worlds' is the often contested progression of children from the kindergarten to the school setting, a progression that kindergarten educators feel they must safeguard beyond their own setting. This concern is exemplified in Ida's description of taking part in coordination meetings with the primary school that her students attend after leaving the kindergarten:

> We met the EC educators from the school… to pass all the information we have about our children to them (…) in socio-affective terms, in terms of their families… but the experience was SO unfortunate (…) all we *[heard were]* problems and complaints; that they move too much and don't abide by rules (…) So at some point… I said, *'I beg your pardon, these are children we're talking about'…* children are movement by essence, I *[thought] 'geez, in which hands have we left them?' [They said] 'they have to concentrate (…)'*, but they are four years old, what level of concentration can a four years-old have? (…) I think their pedagogical approach is very adultist, therefore without any meaning and of no interest for the children (**Ida**, S3: educators' artefacts)

Ida disagrees with the school EC educators' focus on children's imperfections and shortcomings, deeming their approach insensitive and developmentally inappropriate, and attributing these uninformed expectations of children to a schoolified, adultist[52] pedagogical approach. This position-taking exemplifies how a developmentalist perspective, often deemed prescriptive and normative (Canella, 2012; Chang-Kredl, 2018), can be used by EC educators as a means to resist normalising discourses on the child, like the one enacted in schools. At the same time, the educators acknowledged that kindergartens could be subject to the pressures of schoolification as well, being also a part of the wider schooling system. They considered defying schoolification as an important part of their role, even when practicing within kindergartens, identifying the national EC curriculum as a source of help in dealing with this aspect:

> (…) EC education has goals… and one kind of leaves them aside, ignore them to fulfil others' goals and expectations… we lose meaning (…) *[when you]* go back to the EC national curriculum… then your work as EC educator makes sense… your role as an EC educator (…) (**Ida**, S3: educators' artefacts)

While the literature frequently points out the irrelevance of hierarchical notions of expert knowledge to the construction of meaningful understandings of professionalism in EC education (Urban, 2008), in this case it can be argued that the educators considered specialised curricular knowledge as a valuable professional identity discourse beyond seeing it as a mere source of professional validation.

As suggested in this section, participants clearly differentiated themselves from school-based practice and its poor understanding of how children learn and what their needs are. This sharp differentiation seemed to strengthen the educators' resistance to schoolification which they were willing to defy even beyond the classroom. The pillars of this resistance seem to include a well-defined understanding of the EC ethos and their professional role, both aspects being supported by an engagement with specialised knowledge of EC education.

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[52] Considering children from an adult perspective.

The double othering of school-based EC educators

Osgood (2006, 2010), amongst others, has presented EC educators as a unified body. Against this, I offer a brief analysis of some lines of potential fragmentation. Using a participant's account of practicing in a school-based setting, I show how the school context may both exacerbate and destabilise the way in which the educators resist and differentiate themselves from the school's understanding of education and its concomitant effect of schoolification. It exacerbates this clear differentiation as practicing in a school makes the difference between the EC education ethos and the school ethos particularly evident. Yet, at the same time, it destabilises the cohesive effect of this delimitation as school-based EC educators are seen as a different type of EC professionals whose positioning in relation to this professional identity boundary remains unclear.

Four of the eight participants worked in school-based settings. They described what they perceived to be a generalised lack of appreciation for EC education in school contexts where kindergarten learning and EC educators are often not valued. The school-based educators described feelings of invisibility within the wider school community, often associated with a spatial isolation from the rest of the school. However, they saw this spatial isolation at times as potentially good, offering a protective distance from the pressures of school and conferring on them a certain feeling of agency. Eva described how the schoolteachers in her school minimised the EC education work:

> We realise that people from the 'other side' (primary school) still say (about kindergarten children) *'Oh… they are so little, so cute, are they really capable of doing that? Because they are so little… oh poor little things',* so… they pity them, you see? So we tell them *'Ahem, they are children, they are children just like the ones you have there* (in primary education) *they are just at a different stage, and they learn as well'* (**Eva**, S2: the term 'párvulo')

While Eva here stressed the minimisation of children over the dismissal of the work of educators, the need for EC educators to constantly assert themselves in schools was frequently addressed in the participants' discussions. As seen in the following quote, language played an important role in participants' perceptions of invisibility, making this a key sphere to pay attention to and intervene in to assert themselves professionally:

> *[The headmaster]* asked *'Are there any criticisms, what are the strengths, weaknesses [of the school]?' [and]* I said... 'the *use of language... we are EC education, we are EC educators, we are not 'parvulitas[53]' or pre-primary'* so I fight for that, I tell the primary education people ' *you are not pre...*' (**Ida**: pre-secondary...) exactly, we are not pre-primary either, we are the level of EC education, and I have many colleagues who no longer use the term pre-primary (...) other colleagues don't care much about this, but I do care because... according to that language... it is what is expected from us (**Eva**, S5: pedagogical biography)

Eva demands the use of proper terms to refer to EC education, making explicit its equal status to the other school education levels; primary education is not referred to as 'pre-secondary', hence EC education should not be called 'pre-primary' either. This treatment may be an indication of how EC educators' professional capabilities are perceived. While the most prevalent tension addressed by the educators involved the antagonism between EC practice as a whole and the school level, Eva described her experience of being othered[54] not only by primary teachers, but also by EC educators:

> You're between the primary teachers who say, *'you take too much care of them'*... and... the EC educators from lower levels say *'you schoolify them too much'*, so we end up being... *'the ham of the sandwich[55]'* (laughs) (**Eva**, follow up interview)

As seen, there are two sites school-based EC educators can find themselves between; it is not only a matter of tension in relation to the school level, EC educators from 'lower levels'[56] can also have an unfavourable view of school-based EC educators'[57] practice. Ultimately, they are othered by both schoolteachers and kindergarten-based educators. Arguably, this disconfirms the suggestion in the literature that EC educators have a homogeneous experience of belonging to the EC workforce in terms of how the profession is perceived and the professional identities they embody (Osgood, 2006). On the contrary, Eva's experience shows how the fragmentation and discontinuities between school-based and kindergarten-based practice can have a subjective impact on the professional identities of school-based educators. As she continues to describe her experience of practising in a school Eva ultimately comes to terms with the fact that her practice looks different from kindergarten practice; she works with older children,

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[53] Feminine plural diminutive form of 'párvulo' (Chilean term for children who attend EC education).
[54] View or treat (a person or group of people) as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself (EOD).
[55] Chilean saying that means being between two antagonistic positions, without having space to freely move.
[56] Almost exclusively based at kindergartens.
[57] Frequently in charge of four year-olds and five year-olds classes.

who seem to want something different from what canonical EC education offers, they sometimes want 'some school':

> *[Schoolification]* has never made sense to me, but talking to them (kindergarten-based educators), made me give more meaning to what I do and *where* I do it (...) it couldn't be like what they do, because they're other levels, completely different (...) I'm closer to primary education, unfortunately (...) Which doesn't mean I agree with schoolifying EC education, no, no. But it's a different child development stage, what they have to learn or... or the way—what they want as well, because... sometimes they also want, they want some *school* but, but... not as much, not like being in first grade... (**Eva**, follow up interview)

In this sense, Eva's practice may not constitute complete compliance to the constraints of practising in a school-based setting, reflecting instead the enactment of different views on the way children learn, particular to the specific age group of the children she teaches. It can be argued that a contested context of practice like Eva's may stimulate the development of a distinctive, liminal EC professional identity, in constant negotiation between the two mutually unsympathetic worlds of EC education and schools.

This brief discussion has allowed me to destabilise the often unexamined dichotomy between 'proper' kindergarten-based and 'schoolified' school-based EC practice and therefore to problematise the apparent cohesiveness of EC educator identities. Kindergartens can be subject to schoolification too as they try to satisfy the demands of school level. Socialising children in their final years of EC education into some 'schoolified' activities may not be altogether wrong, not all school-based educators are necessarily 'schoolified', and educators may engage in 'schoolifying' practices by choice, without it always being a matter of subjugation. The fact that some EC educators can be othered by fellow EC educators because of their context of practice, shows how EC educator identities may not be as unified as it has been proposed. While uniting in resistance against schools 'from the outside' seems to be quite an organic process, trying to enact this resistance 'from within' the school is much more complicated; it is likely to end up being doubly othered. As argued above, one possible response to this predicament is the emergence of a distinctive liminal identity.

It is possible that Chilean EC educators will increasingly face the challenge of subjectifying themselves in school contexts. While Chilean schools mainly cater for children in the two years prior to primary education entry (from four to five years old) and kindergartens preferably receive children from zero to three years old, one of the bills currently under discussion and discussed in the Introduction may subsidise schools to offer multiple places for two and three year-olds. The different 'EC

educations' discussed - and their EC educators with their similarities and differences - will then cohabit in the space of the school – and very likely feel interpellated to give an account of their professional selves to each other, in an uncharted school context.

CHAPTER 6

What happens in dyads: An 'academic pair'

Introduction

This chapter examines the interactions that took place during a two participant free-associative session with the educators. Building on the observation made in relation to a group setting (Chapter 5) of a distinctive mode of discourse production, mobilisation of affect and relational dynamics, in this chapter I explore what these aspects look like within a dyad[58]. I draw on the overarching concept of intersubjective thirdness and the notions of projective identification and mental digestion, to characterise the mechanisms involved in the production of the dyad, bearing in mind its positionality within a larger group process and my witnessing of its emergence, as a third subject present in the session. I argue that the educators' engagement in the construction of a particularly strong and cohesive dyad may have offered them a means to cope with certain challenging affects elicited by early childhood (EC) practice.

In order to do this, I focus my analysis on two exchanges that took place between two participants during the fourth session in which the educators reacted to *curriculum extracts*. The first incident ('On research') revolves around participants' declared interest in, and appreciation of research, a signifier around which they arguably organised their unconscious dyadic functioning. The second incident ('On the child') depicts their reluctance to engage in the exploration of definitions of the child, exemplifying moments of intensified unconscious functioning during the session and the concomitant strengthening of the dyad's unconscious alliance. Short additional extracts from other instances are included to complement and contextualise the analysis of the two main extracts.

As in the previous chapter, I analyse each extract iteratively, firstly at a descriptive level, then introducing some relevant concepts and finally providing a fuller conceptual discussion. It is worth noting I do not introduce new concepts nor provide a theoretical discussion of the second extract ('On the child'), as this section's main purpose is to follow up the evolution of the participants' previously established unconscious alliance, with a specific focus on their shifting relation to knowledge. I finalise the chapter with a

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[58] Something that consists of two elements or parts (EOD). Term of choice in psychoanalysis for two-subject relationships.

thematic review of the participants' investments in shifting understandings of knowledge in EC education.

About the session

Both exchanges took place during the discussion of the recently updated national curricular framework for EC education, whose previous (and first) version was launched in 2001. I brought, as a prompt for the session, a selection of short extracts from the curriculum, for the participants to read individually and then discuss. It is worth noting that the curriculum document was launched nationwide less than a month before the session, thus participants were scarcely familiarised and very keen to work with it. An example of the curriculum extracts is the following:

> Every girl and boy is an essentially indivisible person, thus they face all learning in an integrated way, participating with their whole being in each experience. They build their learning from their senses, their emotions, their thinking, their corporality, their spirituality, their previous experiences, and their desires (EC education curricular framework, 2018, p. 31)

The only participants that attended this session were Delia and Ida, an unusually low attendance for a group in which only one participant had previously missed a session. Delia, the youngest participant, was 22 years old at the time of the fieldwork. She had recently graduated as an EC educator and worked as a university tutor and research assistant for a state-funded EC education project. Ida had worked as an EC educator for 23 years, exclusively with two and three year-olds in state-funded settings. At the time of the sessions, she worked at a partly state-funded kindergarten located in a socially vulnerable borough in the outskirts of the city.

1. The dyad: on research

The following is a five-minute exchange that took place during the last quarter of the session, from minute 44 to 49. Delia and Ida started discussing being overwhelmed by the EC work, the potential eventual necessity of leaving the profession, and the possibility of engaging in a meaningful practice outside the classroom. This was the first instance in which Ida and Delia's dyadic functioning became evident to me. The following is the complete extract:

1.1 Full extract

Ida: (...) it's very complex... it's very complex to work in education I think... it's very hard, I mean, I really think we must be very principled and well-rounded people when it comes to working with children especially in such critical stages... people who, we must handle a lot of information... we, must be technically very compone-- uh I mean *[we must]* have a lot of technical competencies, but also a lot of emotional competencies because... (**Delia**: yes) human beings... we get *'desbordados' [overflown/overwhelmed]*, and there are situations which, within the institution, that overwhelm you uh, see? So, you have to be a very consummate professional, and-- and that's hard I mean it isn't easy, because uh well, a doctor has to be very consummate as well, but we *[work]* with 40 people, with 35 people, add to that the parents and guardians, add the people who work with you, it's way more... difficult to (**Coca**: mm) uh... cater for this diversity, and not, and not die in the attempt ultimately

Coca: and that *'desborde' [overflow/overwhelmedness]*...?

Ida: in which sense?

Coca: (pause) what... what else comes to mind with, with that idea?

Ida: with the, with the overwhelmedness? Self-care comes *[to mind]* (laughs) to do like, to do self-care, no... I think that uh, when we get overwhelmed, one has to take a step aside... I, I believe that, when you feel very overwhelmed, when uhm... you feel you can't, you can't *[deal]* with this, *[you have]* to take a step aside, at that minute, either immediately, or the next day because, if not... you screw things up, if not... things get screwed up, see? It has happened to me, I've had *aunties* who *[say]* *'You know what auntie?'* (talking to Ida) *I'm getting too...'* (unclear) *'Are you troubled? Well ok, go take a little walk and come back later'* because... that, that overwhelm-- to accumulate overwhelmedness isn't good either, that's why I, when I see the girls struggling I tell them *'ask for a [medical] leave, if you're struggling... ask for a leave and we'll find a substitute, but [don't work] like this, because it's as bad for you* (**Delia**: yes, of course) *as it's worse for the child, or the group of children'*

Delia: Yes (**Ida**: uh...) sometimes one may not even notice and –*[thinking of]* last week when we talked about the disenchantment with work – if you got disenchanted, you better just don't do it (**Ida**: right) maybe, one doesn't become disenchanted... when you are doing well at work, and you are calm, and everything, everything goes well, and you absorb things well, but maybe... an overwhelming factor, which may be affecting your life, can make you feel disappointed and, unfortunately, that can affect your disenchantment so... you better stop, take a break, see if you want to continue, because... if not, it's like a, a bilateral damage, you affect the children, your workgroup... (**Ida**: yourself) yourself... so... it isn't good for anyone to be like that...

Ida: it comes *[to mind]* with, with the word overwhelmedness, is like taking a step aside... and also like generating spaces-- professional spaces of self-care, I mean, to look at oneself, to rethink, to loo-- relook *'geez... maybe I have been in this for too many years... and now it's time for me to look somewhere else* (**Delia**: right) *or maybe, this educational level isn't the most appropriate for me [anymore] because I, I struggle to change nappies now... I don't want to feed [children]... I'm tired',* is also like rethinking one's role within an educational setting (**Delia**: Yes, **Coca**: uhum) Where do you make the biggest contribution? Do you contribute more here, or less there, where do you add something -let's say- instead of taking something away?

Delia: yes... and also, uh, the fact of considering other, places, that are not an educational setting, because education is such an extensive science...

Ida: yes... it allows you so many things

Delia: ...you can play so many roles, maybe if one day you said-- you woke up and said *'well, this isn't my thing anymore...'*, but you like it, but it exhausts you, maybe... this isn't your way, but if... staying in the path of education there's another, like... (**Coca**: mmm) that's also important to consider, that... maybe one gets frustrated because of not being able to work in the classroom, or you can't find a job in a school, who knows, but there are so many... opportunities

Ida: there's so much to contribute

Delia: yess that's true

Ida: I like research, one day I'll do that, research

Delia: me too, in fact, educational projects are what I like the most, to work constructing... I mean I plan to work in the classroom too because I also like it (...)

Ida: and because that will also give you experience (...) *[when]* you have the classroom perspective, you can say *'ok, that's what it comes down to'* because, ultimately, where does one have the biggest impact? In the classroom (**Delia:** yes) there's no other impact...

Delia: ...what credibility would have someone if, for example me, I really like research, and I am 22, and finished *[Uni]* in January, if I start to do research immediately... people would say '*oh this girl has no experience (...) on what basis is she talking*...'

Ida: yes, one... has to research almost from experience (**Delia**: yes, right)

1.2 A first glimpse

Immediately before this exchange, Delia and Ida discussed how psychosocial stressors such as divorcing parents and economic difficulties can have a great impact on children, affecting significantly their behaviour and the way they relate to others in the kindergarten. They also described how children experiencing these kinds of situations are sometimes discriminated against by the kindergarten staff themselves, especially by educator assistants. This is why for Delia and Ida it is crucial that educators are prepared to identify and support these children; preventing the reproduction within the kindergarten of their experience of being neglected in the *outside*. After discussing these issues, Ida started the discussion - which will be characterised by large exchanges - with a long utterance:

> **Ida**: (…) it's very complex… it's very complex to work in education I think… it's very hard, I mean, I really think we must be very <u>principled and well-rounded</u>[59][60] people when it comes to working with children especially in such critical stages… people who, we must handle a lot of information… we, must be technically very compone[61]-- uh I mean *[we must]* have a lot of technical competencies, but also a lot of <u>emotional competencies</u> because… (**Delia**: yes) <u>human beings… we get '*desbordados*' [overflown/overwhelmed]</u>[62], and there are situations which, <u>within the institution</u>, that overwhelm you uh, see? So, you have to be a very consummate professional, and-- and that's hard I mean it isn't easy, because uh well, a doctor has to be very consummate as well, but we *[work]* with 40 people, with 35 people, add to that the parents and guardians, add the people who work with you, it's way more… difficult to (**Coca**: mm) uh… <u>cater for this diversity</u>, and not, and <u>not die in the attempt</u> ultimately

Ida describes the high standards she believes must be met to deal with the complexity of EC work; educators must be principled, and technically and emotionally competent. She then continues to describe why these emotional competencies are required, 'because… human beings… we get overwhelmed'. As addressed in footnote 62, the most prevalent meaning of 'desbordar' in Spanish is to get overflowed, yet it can be understood to mean to get overwhelmed[63]. Given this, it can be argued that the overlapping of these two meanings may denote a high degree of overwhelmedness. Ida's assertion above, in the name of *humankind*, may signal a need to normalise the feeling of being overwhelmed, highlighting it as a universal human experience. Not foregrounding how it seems to capture a personal experience may also allow her to create distance from such an upsetting emotion – especially important as it may be quite prevalent, even inherent to EC work. This intervention marks a shift in relation to the previous discussion, displacing the focus from the vulnerability of children to the at times distressing emotional experience of educators. The source of overwhelmedness,

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[59] As previously mentioned, underlined parts of the quotations signal words or phrases that were central to the interpretations of the material I chose to make in my analysis.

[60] *Principled* and *well-rounded* are the translation of, respectively, *íntegras* and *integrales*. I point out the original words in Spanish, to highlight their relation to *integrity* and *integral*; and as they show one of the ways in which Ida often created her phrases, by introducing a word drawing on a previous one. In this case, adding the syllable *les* turned *íntegras* (principled) into *integrales* (well-rounded).

[61] Here Ida had started to say *component*.

[62] In Spanish, the most common use of *'desbordar'* is to mean to overflow, e.g., '*The river overflowed*'. This meaning becomes especially clear when the word is used as noun 'el desborde'/'the overflow'. Likewise, the use of *'desbordado'* to mean overwhelmed is quite uncommon, as there are several words more frequently used to signify this (*'sobrepasado', 'superado', 'colapsado', 'abrumado',* etc.). However, most Spanish speakers will understand it to refer to overwhelmedness if used in a relevant context. Thus, from now on, I will translate it according to this last acceptation.

[63] Experiencing a strong emotional effect; being inundated; receiving *too much of something* (EOD).

'situations (…) within the institution', is somewhat obscure, not seeming to suggest actual institutional constraints or stressors. The overwhelmedness does not particularly seem to stem from the relation with children either. This may be evidenced by Ida's further non-hierarchized enumeration of parents, guardians and colleagues, as additional actors who contribute to making EC work such an impossible endeavour whose undertaking may entail 'dying in the attempt'.

A notion of *quantity,* as seen in the '40 (…) 35 people' Ida mentions, seems to be at play by the end of this uninterrupted utterance, possibly hinting at the hypothesised great extent of overwhelmedness. In the following exchange, I repeat the word to Ida:

> **Coca**: and that *desborde [overflow/overwhelmedness]*...?
> **Ida**: <u>in which sense</u>?
> **Coca**: (pause) what... what else comes to mind with, with that idea?
> **Ida**: with the, with the overwhelmedness? <u>Self-care</u> comes *[to mind]* (<u>laughs</u>) to do like, to do self-care, no... I think that uh, when we get overwhelmed, one has to <u>take a step aside</u>... I, I believe that, when you feel very overwhelmed, when uhm... you feel you can't, you can't *[deal]* with this, *[you have]* to take a step aside, at that minute, either <u>immediately, or the next day</u> because, if not... you <u>screw things up</u>[64], if not... things get screwed up, see? It has happened to me, I've had *aunties*[65] who *[say] 'You know what auntie?* (talking to Ida) *I'm getting too...'* (unclear) *'Are you troubled? Well ok, go take a little walk and come back later'* because… that, that overwhelm-- <u>to accumulate overwhelmedness isn't good</u> either, that's why I, when I see the girls struggling I tell them *'ask for a [medical] leave, if you're struggling… ask for a leave and we'll find a substitute, but [don't work] like this, because it's as bad for you* (**Delia**: yes, of course) *as it's worse for the child, or the group of children'*

As previously indicated, the use of *desborde* as a noun gravitates more towards overflow. This is why introducing it - as I do above - in a dialogue that at that point was quite clearly about overwhelmedness may have operated in a slightly more ambiguous manner; while the connotation of *overwhelmedness* was made less clear, the allusion to *overflow* was somewhat emphasised. As seen, the word *desborde* seems especially suited to operating as an open signifier, that is, as a word that which does not have a univocal or fixed meaning, whose meaning (signified) can vary depending on its relative position within the discourse (Evans, 2006). This slight movement towards overflow may have enabled the further expression of the vague idea/experience of

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[64] Translation of the Chilean slang *'dejar la escoba'* (literally *'to leave the broom'*), which means to screw things up, make a mess or cause a disaster.

[65] Chilean colloquialism for EC educator. It has been used since the beginnings of the profession, not only by children and EC educators but by Chilean society as a whole. Only in recent years, it has come to be considered patronising and de-professionalising. However, its use among EC educators to call each other seems to remain quite accepted.

quantity introduced in the previous quotation; a notion that I will expand in the next section.

Ida suddenly replied, 'in which sense?', with a surprised intonation. As described in the Methodology chapter, this was not the first time Ida reacted with surprise to her own words. An example of this took place during session three, where ten minutes after introducing the idea of *renewing (professional) vows* - and elaborating on it for a while - she was completely puzzled to hear me repeat it, replying 'what vows?' This may exemplify how one becomes dispossessed of one's own speech shortly after uttering it, experiencing it as unfamiliar when it is (re)presented to us by others (Laplanche, 1999)[66]. Concurrently, it may also indicate a certain defensiveness, elicited by the feeling of being held accountable for one's own words and their implications.

Ida's perspective exudes strictness; an educator who is emotionally overwhelmed 'must take a step aside (…) either immediately, or the next day', otherwise 'things [will] get screwed up'. Ida's uncompromising position may indicate a perception of intense, *overflowing* emotions as being inevitably risky. In this way, a comment described at the beginning as being about *self-care* - a declaration immediately disconfirmed by laughter - ended up discussing almost exclusively the possibility, and avoidance, of hurting others. As anticipated, a notion of quantity seemed to appear again, as seen in Ida's assertion of overwhelmedness as something that can accumulate perilously. The next comment shows Delia's first response to Ida's interventions:

> **Delia**: Yes (**Ida**: uh…) sometimes one may not even notice and –*[thinking of]* last week when we talked about the disenchantment with work-, <u>if you got disenchanted</u>, you <u>better just don't do it</u> (**Ida**: right) maybe, <u>one doesn't become disenchanted</u>... when you are doing well at work, and you are calm, and everything, everything goes well, and <u>you absorb things well</u>, but maybe… an <u>overwhelming factor</u>, which may be affecting your life, can make you feel disappointed and, unfortunately, that can <u>affect your disenchantment</u> so… you better stop, take a break, see if you want to continue, because… if not, it's like a, a <u>bilateral damage</u>, you affect the children, your workgroup… (**Ida**: yourself) yourself… so… it isn't good for anyone to be like that…

Delia's point of view on the matter appears as strict as Ida's, 'if you got disenchanted, you better just don't do it'. She starts her intervention making reference to the idea of

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[66] As discussed in the Theoretical framework chapter, an unexpected experience of one's own discourse, as if it came from somewhere else is especially facilitated by free-associative work. Even more so, the addressal of another person in the context of free association opens the possibility of hearing oneself pronounce words aloud. This returns words in the form of ambiguous signifiers, foregrounding its polysemy.

enchantment; a pivotal signifier that emerged in the previous meeting (session three[67]) and became particularly evocative for the group, as seen in Delia's recalling of it one week later. In brief terms, *enchantment* was discussed as a crucial attribute of the educators' relation to EC education understood as a practice, a body of knowledge, and a specific mode of relation to children. Participants then discussed the possibility of losing *enchantment* (becoming disenchanted), and the imperative to become *reenchanted* as soon as possible. In this context, Delia's evocation of this discussion as revolving around *disenchantment* raises interesting questions, as this specific word was never used during the previous session. The absence of this word may have signalled how unacceptable such state would be to participants; educators must be either *enchanted* or *reenchanted*, thus when *enchantment* is lost, it must be quickly regained. Delia's use of *enchantment* in its negative form may suggest its significance for her, arguably signalling that a certain affect was mobilised by the signifier yet repressed in the previous session.

Delia continued to describe how an 'overwhelming factor (…) can affect your disenchantment'; an interesting phrasing as well, seemingly posing disenchantment as a pre-existent disposition that antecedes the overwhelming factor. In this way, her engagement with the notion of *disenchantment* may indicate a simultaneous movement of identification and dis-identification with her colleagues. While *disenchantment* seems to offer Delia a way to relate to what may take place in classroom practice, it ultimately foregrounds her non-identification with her colleagues, arguably made patent by her not choosing to practice in the classroom up to that moment. As a counterpoint to the overwhelming factor, Delia described what could be understood as an opposite state in which disenchantment simply could not take place, 'you are doing well at work (…) you are calm (…) everything goes well, and you absorb things well'. Delia's reference to absorption resonates with the psychoanalytic notion of mental digestion, a concept I will develop in the next section in order to conceptualise this quotation. Immediately afterwards, Ida resumed her elaboration on overwhelmedness:

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[67] In which participants shared an artefact that reminded them of 'the child'.

130

> **Ida**: it comes *[to mind]* with, with the word overwhelmedness, is like taking a step
> aside... and also like generating spaces-- professional spaces of self-care, I
> mean, <u>to look at oneself</u>, to rethink, to loo-- relook *'geez... maybe I have been in*
> *this for <u>too many years</u>... and now it's time for me to <u>look somewhere else</u>* (**Delia**:
> right) *or maybe, this educational level isn't the most appropriate for me*
> *[anymore] because I, <u>I struggle to change nappies</u> now... <u>I don't want to feed</u>*
> *[children]... I'm tired',* is also like <u>rethinking one's role</u> within an educational
> setting (**Delia**: Yes, **Coca**: uhum) Where do you make the biggest contribution?
> Do you contribute more here, or less there, where do you <u>add something</u> -let's
> say- <u>instead of taking something</u> away[68]?

Ida brings the focus back to the experience of educators, seeming to give greater
consideration to the idea of self-care, defining it as moments of self-observation, 'to look
at oneself'. She then proceeds to exemplify what an overwhelmed educator might
say/feel; in a depiction that strongly resembles her own experience of having worked
for over 23 - maybe 'too many' - years exclusively with two and three year-olds, who
must be *fed* and whose *nappies need to be changed*. For Ida, this intense experience of
tiredness should lead educators to rethink their professional role so they can maximise
their opportunities to make a contribution and, arguably more importantly, to avoid the
potentially draining effect that a disinvested practice may have. In other words, Ida's
concealed narrative, in a somewhat melancholic description of what professional
exhaustion may look like, seems to position her as someone who may have to leave the
classroom herself. Yet she promptly turns her assertion to something positive, drawing
attention to the fruitfulness of finding a meaningful new role. With a sense of relief
Delia continues to elaborate on the possibility of envisioning different roles within EC
education:

> **Delia**: yes... and also, uh, the fact of considering other, places, that are not an
> educational setting, because education is <u>such an extensive science</u>...
> **Ida**: yes... it allows you so many things
> **Delia**: ...you can play so many roles, maybe if one day you said-- you woke up and said
> *'well, this <u>isn't my thing anymore</u>...',* but you like it, but it exhausts you, maybe...
> this isn't your way, but if... <u>staying in</u> the path of education there's another,
> like... (**Coca**: mmm) that's also important to consider, that... maybe one gets
> <u>frustrated</u> because of not being able to work in the classroom, or you can't find
> a job in a school, who knows, but there are so many... opportunities
> **Ida:** there's so much to contribute
> **Delia:** yess that's true

In a similar way to Ida, Delia imagines and describes the experience of a weary
educator who feels the work 'isn't [her] thing anymore' yet who might be able to stay

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[68] Ida's literal expression was 'where do you *add* -let's say-, and do not *subtract*' (both add and
subtract are intransitive verbs in Spanish).

on the 'path of education, such an extensive science'. She goes on in what seems to be a depiction of her own incipient relation to classroom practice, to describe a different type of frustration, in this case not related to exhaustion, but associated with not having been granted access to the classroom. The discussion on new, different or alternative roles, takes shape in what follows, in the image of research:

> **Ida:** I like research, <u>one day I'll do that</u>, research
> **Delia:** me too, in fact, educational projects are <u>what I like the most</u>, to work constructing... I mean <u>I plan to work in the classroom</u> too because I also like it (...)
> **Ida:** and because <u>that will also give you experience</u> (...) *[when]* you have the classroom perspective, you can say *'ok, that's what it comes down to'* because, ultimately, where does one have the biggest impact? In the classroom (**Delia:** yes) <u>there's no other impact</u>...
> **Delia:** ...<u>what credibility would have</u> someone if, for example me, I really like research, and I am 22, and finished *[Uni]* in January, if I start to do research immediately... people would say '*oh this girl has no experience (...) on what basis is she talking*...'
> **Ida:** yes, one... has to research almost from experience (**Delia**: yes, right)

Ida and Delia start the last part of their exchange asserting a shared inclination for research, 'one day I'll do that (...)'; '[it is] what I like the most (...)'. This exchange - around the start of the last quarter of the session - in which Delia and Ida seemed to put the signifier research in an overlapping site of desire, marked for me the moment in which they emerged as what I have called an 'academic[69] pair'. By using the word *academic,* I aim to denote Ida and Delia's interest in extra-classroom scholarly activities. Later in the chapter, I problematize the type of alliance they constitute by, for example, looking at a previous exchange in which they agreed over dogmatic views on (research on) play. Likewise, I will analyse in detail their discussion on the child, in which they coincided again in emphatic views about the child and their representation in the curriculum, further consolidating themselves in a strong alliance.

1.3 Adding some layers

In this section, I focus on two specific elements of Ida and Delia's exchange: the notion of quantity, as seen in Ida's account of overwhelmedness as something that may accumulate to the point of disaster, and Delia's reference to a capacity for 'absorbing things well'. I argue that the experience of a large amount of affect perceived as excessive underlies both ideas.

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[69] (Of a person) interested in or excelling at scholarly pursuits and activities (EOD).

In psychoanalysis, the idea of 'amount' becomes relevant if one takes an economic[70] perspective. An 'amount' is mobilised as an aspect of libidinal cathexes, an affective, psychic charge that can be received by the psyche or directed to other persons, ideas, or the psyche itself (Freud, 1921). Difficulties of symbolisation can potentially emerge when there is an (ineffable) libidinal excess. This dynamism may turn subjects into 'slaves of quantity' (M'uzan, 2003), as not all the libido can access the psyche, that is, it cannot acquire a mental representation. The capacity to process (large amounts of) affect relates to Wilfred Bion's (1962) understanding of thinking and, specifically of the function of *mental digestion.*

Bion (1962; in Pelled, 2017) states that one of the first aims of thinking is the elimination of tension by means of hallucination; this can be seen in the infant's hallucinatory satisfaction of their alimentary needs. In this sense, Bion considers thinking a pain-modifying apparatus which can create the possibility of learning from experience. Specifically, this possibility depends on the existence of a *mental digestive system* in which the sensory and emotional experiences of the infant are translated - by what is called the alpha function, normally provided by the mother - into mental elements which can then be used at a conscious level. This primary mechanism of communication between mother and infant is therefore crucial to the development of thought. However, the infant can only start to develop their own thinking to the extent they can develop the capacity to tolerate the frustration caused by *undigested facts,* also known as *beta elements*. These elements consist in raw, perceptual and affective impressions, often experienced as intolerable which, as long as they remain unprocessed, cannot be *thought by the mind*; this is why dealing with them becomes one of the main functions of the mental apparatus. In this context, an intensive use of projective identification may emerge as a means to eliminate these undigested (or indigestible) elements. Nevertheless, as Pelled (2017) explains, such a use of projective identification leads to paradoxical results, as the activation of an intensive evacuative drive makes the digestion of experience impossible (p. 7).

In this sense, Delia's description of an overwhelming factor that breaks the continuity of a *good absorption* of things (in this context, raw *yet-to-be* thought affective impressions) could be understood as the irruption of undigested facts whose intolerability may elicit a destructive projective response capable of causing *bilateral*

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[70] Concerned with the vicissitudes of amounts of excitation, in the sense of psychic energy, indispensable to a complete description of a mental process (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973 p. 127).

damage[71]. Concurrently, absorption may here offer a description of a particular mode of relation to the external world in which the boundaries that separate the subject from the world are perceived to be permeable. This permeability may at times make absorption unmanageable, leaving the subject prone to being overpowered by what is perceived to be the pervasive influence of external elements. This reading of absorption may be supported by Delia's further use of the term one year later. In her follow-up interview, she described her experience of having participated in the group sessions in terms of absorption:

> **Delia**: I felt I was learning the whole time, absorbing like a little sponge, everything they were saying, uh and at the same time creating possibilities in my head, of how to act, how to approach a given thing...

Delia's depiction of herself *absorbing like a little sponge* everything that was said may signal a specific use of projective identification with an *acquisitive* purpose; that is, aiming at entering the mind of the recipients - in this case her senior groupmates - to acquire desired aspects. Arguably, her groupmates' classroom experience and associated experiential knowledge is what Delia desired, as seen in her use of it '(...) to create possibilities in [her] head'. Drawing on the above, the group format seems to have elicited in Delia a highly permeable relation to her groupmates, to the extent that it arguably dissolved her own centre allowing her to take direction from others regarding how 'to act, (...) to approach [things]'.

2. Discussion on the emergence of thirdness: between the dyad and the group

Ogden (1994, 2004; in Rizzolo, 2011) first coined the notion of an *analytic third* to describe the intersubjective bond between the analyst and the analysand. However, the concept has proved to be useful outside the clinic, characterising what has been called a *third* area of experience, in which the dialectic encounter between two subjectivities takes place, creating an *intersubjective third*. The concern with *tertiary* phenomena, also referred to as *thirdness*, can be traced back to Winnicott's (1959) notion of a

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[71] It is possible that the expression Delia had in mind here was *collateral damage*; that is, the damage inflicted - in combatant terms - on an unintended target (EOD). Interestingly, both in English and Spanish the expression bilateral damage is only used in the context of organ and body injury, mostly to describe brain lesions that involve both cerebral hemispheres. Delia's use of *bilateral damage*, to describe the possible consequence of not being able to process the emotional intensity of EC practice, may have also had the function of signifying the 'attack to thought' that this irruption of emotion can represent.

transitional space, understood as a third area of living; between the subjectivities of the mother and the infant, and between the subject's internal world and reality.

A kindred notion, which precedes Ogden's *analytic third* is that of *analytic field* (Baranger & Baranger [1961-1962] 2008; in Bernardi, 2017), first emerged to describe the basic fantasy that can be created in a couple relationship in the analytic session. According to Rigas (2012), what is central to the notion of field is the engagement of two persons in the same dynamic procedure in which neither of them can be conceived without reference to the other (p. 183). The field then is the result of the dyad's joint activity of generating unconscious *field fantasies*, also referred to as *couple* or *bipersonal* fantasies (Bezoari & Ferro, 1991; in Civitarese & Ferro, 2013). In 1979, Baranger replaced his term *analytic field* with *intersubjective field* in order to reflect that what is at stake is not the mere encounter of two bodies or two persons, but of two divided subjects (Bernardi, 2017 p.549). The notion of field provided the basis for what was later known as Bionian Field Theory, a perspective according to which it is the field itself that makes intersubjectivity and the growth of the mind possible (Foehl, 2013).

Ogden (2004) has crucially transposed the consideration of the notion of projective identification to the realm of tertiary processes. As developed in the previous chapter, projective identification involves the fantasy of evacuating parts of oneself onto another person with the purpose of protecting oneself from the projected aspect, or as a way of safeguarding it (Klein 1946, 1955; in Ogden, 2004). For Ogden, what is interpersonal about projective identification is that it transforms the subjectivity of both counterparts, negating their individual subjectivities[72]. The projector negates the recipient as a separate subject, co-opting the recipient's subjectivity with its own. Concurrently, the projector disowns their projected aspects, negating them as a part of their subjectivity as well. In this way, this mutually negating process creates a *third* subject, the *subject of projective identification*, in which the individuals engaged in this type of relatedness, by subjugating themselves to this co-constructed intersubjective third, are allowed to '[free] themselves from the limits of whom they had been to that point' (p. 189). The notion of an intersubjective third therefore covers a variety of different ways of understanding what is produced between - and exceeds - two independent subjectivities. As I develop later, it is precisely the idea of thirdness that

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[72] Ogden's suggestion that it is possible to think of an individual subjectivity draws on a Kleinian understanding of the unconscious, from which it is deemed possible to distinguish internal from external unconscious life.

which will allow to problematise the notion that there is such thing as an independent subjectivity.

In what follows, I address the notion of *pairing*, a specific aspect of Bion's group theory that may shed light on an understanding of dyads. Bion (1961) posed two modes of group activity; the *work-group*, a rational group that works together around a task, and the *basic assumption group*, a primitive mode of group mental functioning characterised by unconscious defensive activity and powerful emotional drives (Bion 1961; in Szykierski, 2014). He identified three patterns of *basic assumptions* (*bas*): dependence *(baD)*, fight/flight (*baF)* and pairing *(baP)*. In the *dependent* group, the basic assumption is that someone is there in the group to provide security. *Fight and flight* constitute reactions to what the group wants to avoid because it confronts the group with the need to abandon primitive ideas. When these two modes of functioning prove to be inefficient, *pairing* can take place. This takes the form of a discussion between two group members, with the underlying sexual fantasy of reproduction as a means to preserve the group. According to Sutherland (1990), pairing constitutes the more developed of the three patterns, as a confirmation of the self is sought in the relation with the other. A deep level of pairing can activate the mother-infant pair as a response to mounting anxiety; when this happens the group gives the pair their rapt attention and provides them with security. In terms of the productivity of applying the notion of *pairing* to the consideration of dyads (which are not necessarily in the context of a 'literal' group)*,* Szykierski (2010) asserts it is possible to do this without losing the group framework. Drawing on Bion, he states that since the analyst-analysand pair can be seen as part of a larger group situation (e.g. psychoanalysis, society, etc.), then it is possible for their transferential relation to exhibit the characteristics of the pairing group. Civitarese and Ferro (2013) concur, claiming that Bion's (1948) description of unconscious fantasy in the context of the *basic assumptions* can be completely applied to the analytic couple. From their perspective, the analytic couple does not only exist in a group context; it is a group in itself and can establish mutual emotional bonds and further share and act on a basic assumption modality (p. 193). Following this line of thought, it could be argued that dyads may never exist completely outside a group context.

Delia and Ida's engagement with free-association during the session may have stimulated their co-creation of an analytic field whose predominant unconscious fantasy revolved around idealised notions of research. Their adoption of this dyadic

136

function was arguably sustained by the use of complex projective mechanisms whose main dynamics I summarise in the rest of this section.

Research seemingly arose for Ida and Delia as a different type of desire, arguably constituting the only worthy departure from the classroom. However, it may be impossible for research to completely *depart* from the classroom to constitute a new desire on its own as research seems to only exist in relation to the classroom, stemming from the loss of a former desire for it. Ida seems to navigate this tension with a certain ambivalence between her desire to consider research a valuable aim in itself and her quite categorical (perhaps exclusive) assertion that classroom practice is the most meaningful labour, '(...) there's no other impact'. This may place the desire for research in a paradoxical space, constrained by the impotence of research not being truly able to have a significant effect. Concurrently, Delia herself also dismisses any engagement with research which does not have classroom practice as a starting point 'what credibility would [I] have (...)', regardless of this implying she lacks a crucial element to start traversing the field. In this way, Delia's aim of foregrounding research seems to be subsumed by Ida's aim of prioritising experience. This can be seen in the prescriptive way that Ida interrupts Delia's description of why she would like to work in the classroom, promptly providing the reason why she should do it, 'because that will also give you experience (...)'. Here, Ida may be unconsciously projecting her perspective onto Delia in order to dominate some aspects of her mind - in this case, her engagement with her practice - thus provoking her to feel and act according to the projection. This last part of the exchange may, at the very least, have been conflictive for Delia given her recently assumed role as a research assistant. This can be seen in this short quotation from the previous session:

> **Delia**: Two weeks ago, I started working at Conicyt[73] (**All**: <u>mmm</u>; **Someone**: <u>well done</u>!) and... my role is to pilo-- uh to do the pilot of... a new programme called uh '*Your Competences in Science*', it targets upper-middle levels and prekindergarten classes, but we also added a kindergarten class[74] to do the pilot, so <u>my role is to go to the nurseries and... film the educators</u>, then <u>we have a conversation</u>, <u>I bring to the table</u> like, <u>everything that happened</u> (...)

The potential conflict may have to do with at least two aspects: firstly, Delia's perceived lack of entitlement to pursue research because of her scarce classroom experience; and

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[73] National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research. The same governmental body that funded my PhD.

[74] *Upper middle levels, prekindergartens* and *kindergartens* correspond to, respectively, three year-olds, four year-olds and five year-olds classes.

secondly, the disturbance of the hierarchical junior-novice/seniors-expert relation between Delia and her groupmates, given the overseeing character of the role she is undertaking. Delia is not only involved in the appraisal of educators '[I] go to the nurseries and film the educators', but also seems to have the role of leading the subsequent discussion, 'we have a conversation, I bring to the table everything that happened (…)'. It can be speculated that Ida's dominant reaction, discussed above, may also have constituted a response to this perceived breakage of the power asymmetry and aiming at fostering a feeling of sameness between the both of them.

Ida and Delia shared a perception of EC work, with its intensity and difficulties, as potentially overwhelming. The magnitude of this unprocessed affect may make it impossible to deal with, eliciting in both Delia and Ida a fear of their own destructiveness as a possible response to it. Delia seems to describe *digestive* mental processes, both as a response to overflowing affect and as a mode of relation to the external world. The latter seems to ultimately crystalize in her use of an acquisitive mode of projective identification in order to absorb, for example, her groupmates' experiential knowledge. Concurrently, Ida seems to use projective identification for controlling purposes, arguably to deal with a perceived *inverse* power asymmetry (as described above) in Delia's evaluative role over senior educators, and with the sadness of leaving the classroom, in spite of being certain it is the ethical thing to do when feeling overwhelmed. In Delia's case, the idea of not being able to work in the classroom seems to elicit frustration. Finally, Ida and Delia seem to find in research the possibility of constructing a new desire, porous to the extent of having been born from loss. It is worth noting it is not clear what the research they have in mind looks like, yet leaving it as an empty signifier seems central to their ability to project idealised meanings onto research. As Straker (2006) points out, when the capacity to mentalise is compromised by the irruption of overwhelming affect, *experience-distant* concepts - in this case, an intellectualised view of research - may come at rescue.

As has been demonstrated, Ida and Delia's intersubjective field was characterised by an intensive use of projective identification, arguably constituting the dyad's predominant mode of communication. Projective identification's concomitant diffusion of subjective boundaries may have allowed Delia and Ida to engage in a joint mode of relation to research, a crucial signifier of their practice. This could be understood as a specific manifestation of intersubjective thirdness, the emergence of the subject of projective identification.

3. The dyad: on the child

The following exchange took place immediately after the previously discussed extract, from minute 53 to 62. Delia and Ida engage with views on children as *results* and *projections*, both conceptualisations seemingly stemming from children's relation to adults. In this exchange, Ida and Delia's dyadic alliance seemed to strengthen, exhibiting a consistently cohesive unconscious functioning. The following is the complete extract:

3.1 Full extract

> **Coca**: What else? What else would you include in, in the curriculum *[framework]*, what is the boy, the girl, what is the *'párvulo'*[75] like? (pause)
>
> **Ida**: I think they are, the result of something, I mean, although children are unique and unrepeatable, children can be the result of something, they can be the result of very traumatic situations, as well as the result, of situations that are very loving for them, uh? uhm... let's see, and they are also, children must also be conceived considering their biological characteristics, premature children for example are very different... premature, extraprema-- uh extremely premature children are very different from children who have had for example, a-- a normal gestation, huh... sometimes that, in one way or another makes them different, with different needs, here also come to mind... children with special educational needs (...) these children are the result of something, uh? Of our-- our lack of inclusion, both, structural, social, emotional, that's why I think they are the result of something (**Delia**: mm) of our negligence... of our incomprehension, of, of our violations too
>
> **Delia:** Adding to what you said, about children being results, they are also results with projections, projections of them, like... they can achieve more, develop, become, well-rounded adults later, hopefully; projections for one as a professional, because they set a challenge for you, each child sets a particular challenge for you; and also projections like... at the state-level, for instance, how to consider children with special educational needs within quote unquote 'normal' classrooms, uh... these are projections as well (...) children generate these projections because ultimately, uh... you consider more and more the whole range of situations, that you must take into account, instead of... segregating... within the classroom... They are results with projections, I mean, hopefully of improvement both personal and educational, and for society, because they are people who'll make a contribution later, to society
>
> **Ida**: within, within their possibilities (**Delia**: right) so, that's why I think they are, let's say, when I say results, I mean that they are this lack of projections, this lack of, of, of opportunities ultimately, that's why you sometimes say '*geez, these kids are like this, because they haven't had the opportunity, society hasn't given them... the system hasn't given them the opportunity that, that they should have, by right*'

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[75] As previously explained, párvulo is a child who attends EC education.

Coca: (clicks tongue) brilliant... well, in the remaining minutes I wanted to tell you how I chose these extracts, uhm... I searched in the curriculum for every part that depicted what boys and girls are like, and (...) it caught my attention that... in a document that is quite long (**Ida**: yes it's quite extensive) there aren't many allusions to...

Ida: ...and in fact, there isn't a definition of the child

Coca: right... that was sort of what I was trying to look at (**Ida**: mm), and in fact *[the paragraphs]* I chose for us to discuss today, are those that referred a bit more to the child in the present moment; whereas the rest of them were more focused on '*the child must be...*', '*in the future the child will become...*', or '*if we promote this in the child, this will happen...*', so I chose these (**Ida**: but) as they talked a bit more about the child... now

Ida: but... would it be good to define a child? Is it good to have a concept of the child? I mean we, as a country... or as an educational level, should we have a concept of the child... or maybe... projections for them instead?

Delia: I think maybe if we define the child, like... *'the child is...'* we are kind of stereotyping them (...) like *'I wish all children were like this'* (**Ida**: right) and we are not respecting diversity

Ida: Yes, and we would be shooting ourselves in the foot because, if we talk about children being subjects of law and in constant change, that definition should change every day... because we also have, there are issues that make us-- migration itself, it's giving us different children (**Delia**: right) other definitions of the child, so I think maybe we should aim at a projection (**Delia**: yes) of what we want as childhoods (**Delia**: right) what we as adults have to, have the obligation *of*, providing these childhoods with... more than a definition of a boy or a girl...

Delia: ...because in the end... the only real thing about defining a child (...) is that they is a human of law...

Ida: from zero to nine years...

Delia: from zero to nine... (**Ida**: right) it's the only thing... like (**Ida**: right) real and sustainable (**Ida**: right) and (unclear)

Ida: and verifiable and-- measurable, let's say, that they is zero months, that they is one month old, and that we can prove, but, a definition as such, it's like... geez, it's like... that's why I tell you, here-- we don't allude at any point, with that definition, to what we uh talk about inclusion or diversity (**Coca**: mm) so, I think that, it wouldn't be of interest... I believe we should never define a boy or a girl, but rather let them define themselves based on what we as adults and society give them, which are these rights, that they have

Delia: yes, I totally agree

Coca: mm excellent

Delia: Oh, I loved this session (laughs)

3.2 A first glimpse

The following analysis' main purpose is to illustrate how Ida and Delia continued to knit their shared discourse tightly, especially towards the end of the session:

Coca: What else? What else would you include in, in the curriculum *[framework]*, what is the boy, the girl, what is the *párvulo* like? (pause)

Ida: I think they are, the result of something, I mean, <u>although</u> children are <u>unique and unrepeatable</u>, children can be the <u>result of something</u>, they can be the result of very traumatic situations, as well as the result, of situations that are very loving for them, uh? uhm... let's see, and they are also, children must also be conceived considering their <u>biological characteristics</u>, premature children for example are very different... <u>premature, extraprema</u>-- uh <u>extremely premature</u> children are very different from children who have had for example, a-- a normal gestation, huh... sometimes that, in one way or another makes them different, with different needs, here also come to mind... children with special educational needs (...) these children are the result of something, uh? Of our-- <u>our lack of inclusion</u>, both, <u>structural, social, emotional</u>, that's why I think they are the result of something (**Delia**: mm) of <u>our negligence</u>... of our <u>incomprehension</u>, of, of our <u>violations</u> too

My question follows up Delia and Ida's last interventions in which they described what they would include in the national curriculum in terms of how the child is depicted in it. Ida starts her response signalling that she is about to pose a paradox, the fact that children, while unique and unrepeatable, are the result of something: of the particular *traumatic, loving* situations they have been exposed to, and of their biologic characteristics. Ida's laborious utterance of 'premature, *extraprema* ... extremely premature children', seems to convey the image of very fragile, vulnerable children. She then states how children are also the result of how we (mis)treat them, exclusively mentioning their survival despite our lack of *inclusion, negligence, incomprehension* and *violations*. This deterministic description of children seems to leave them in a non-agentic position in which their uniqueness mostly translates into their many different needs, which should be met by adults. Delia, readily building on Ida's intervention, brings the discussion to an imagined future:

Delia: Adding to what you said, about children being results, they are also results with projections, projections of them, like... <u>they can achieve more, develop, become, well-rounded adults</u> later, hopefully; <u>projections for one as a professional</u>, because they set a challenge for you, each child sets a particular challenge for you; and also projections like... <u>at the state level</u>, for instance, how to consider children with special educational needs within quote unquote 'normal' classrooms, uh... these are projections as well (...) children generate these projections because ultimately, uh... you consider more and more the whole range of situations, that you must take into account, instead of... segregating... within the classroom... <u>They are results with projections</u>, I mean, hopefully of <u>improvement both personal and educational, and for society</u>, because they are <u>people who'll make a contribution</u> later, to society

Ida: within, within their possibilities (**Delia**: right) so, that's why I think they are, let's say, when I say results, I mean that <u>they are this lack of projections</u>, this lack of, of, <u>of opportunities</u> ultimately, that's why you sometimes say '*geez, these <u>kids are like this, because they haven't had the opportunity</u>, society hasn't given them... the system hasn't given them the opportunity that, that they should have, by right*'

141

Delia describes children as full of potential, '[able to] achieve more, develop, become well-rounded adults'. She calls this potentiality *projections*[76]; arguably not in a psychoanalytic sense but alluding to the ideas of forecast and of materialisation of a mental image. For Delia, the child as future project also creates professional projections fuelled by challenge for both educators and for the state. Delia then describes how the projections of improvement she is envisioning for children are not only 'personal and educational', but also societal, as children 'are people who'll make a contribution'. As seen in Delia's integration of her and Ida's perspective, 'they are results with projections'; she seems to describe a child at the same time determined by their past, and ready to *depart* to the future. Drawing on Delia's notion of projections, Ida rephrases her idea of children as results, into children as a 'lack of projections [and] opportunities'. Again, it is a view of vulnerable and neglected children; 'kids are like this', arguably connoting undesirable traits or behaviours. In what follows, I explain to Ida and Delia my criteria for selecting the curriculum extracts I brought to the session:

> **Coca**: (clicks tongue) brilliant... well, in the remaining minutes I wanted to tell you how I chose these extracts, uhm... <u>I searched in the curriculum</u> for every part that <u>depicted what boys and girls are like</u>, and (...) it caught my attention that... in a document that is quite long (**Ida**: yes it's quite extensive) <u>there aren't many allusions to</u>...
> **Ida**: ...and in fact, there isn't a definition of the child
> **Coca**: right... that was sort of what I was trying to look at (**Ida**: mm), and in fact *[the paragraphs]* I chose for us to discuss today, are those that <u>referred a bit more to the child in the present moment</u>; whereas the <u>rest of them were more focused on</u> '*the child must be...*', '*in the future <u>the child will become</u>...*', or '*if we promote this in the child, this will happen...*', so I chose these (**Ida**: but) as they talked a bit more about the child... now

As this was the first session to which I brought content, instead of ambiguous prompts to discuss, I deemed it appropriate to share my rationale with Ida and Delia at the end of the session. I did this to make them part of the methodology instead of leaving them just having passively experienced it. As I imply in the quote, my selection of extracts was informed by the tension between *being* and *becoming*, posed by Duhn (2006, 2008, 2014, etc.) as a productive distinction to consider how the child is depicted in EC curricula. Duhn (2014), drawing on the *Deleuzian*[77] notion of becoming, has pointed out how current curricular trends often advance -increasingly acclaimed - discourses on

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[76] (1) An estimate or forecast of a future situation (...); (2) A mental image viewed as reality; (3) The unconscious transfer of one's desires or emotions to another person; etc. (EOD).

[77] A discussion of Deleuzoguattarian scholarship in EC education can be found in the Literature review chapter.

children's individuality, agency and potentiality. An example of this is New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* EC curriculum (1996, last revised in 2017), which describes children as having *roots* and *wings*, the latter understood as the capacity to deal with the unfamiliar challenges of a changing world (p. 225). However, according to Duhn, this kind of discourse may be instrumental to the neoliberal agenda of producing cosmopolitan citizens, that is, children who will develop the knowledge, skills and competencies to navigate and further contribute to a globalised world. In hindsight, I consider that I overstressed how this distinction informed my selection of curriculum extracts. I may have done this in response to what I deemed to be Delia and Ida's largely *becoming*-oriented depictions of the child, and in an attempt to bring this tension to their attention, to gauge the extent it was important to them, or whether they were able to notice it in the curriculum. Ida's determined response to my intervention was the following:

> **Ida**: but… <u>would it be good to define a child</u>? Is it good to have a concept of the child? I mean we, as a country… or as an educational level, <u>should we have a concept of the child… or maybe… projections for them instead</u>?
> **Delia**: I think maybe if we define the child, like… *'the child is…'* <u>*we are kind of stereotyping them*</u> (…) like *'I wish all children were like this'* (**Ida**: right) and we are *not respecting diversity*
> **Ida**: Yes, and we would be <u>shooting ourselves in the foot because</u>, if we talk about children being <u>subjects of law[78] and in constant change</u>, that definition should change every day… because we also have, there are issues that make us-- migration itself, it's giving us different children (**Delia**: right) other definitions of the child, so I think <u>maybe we should aim at a projection</u> (**Delia**: yes) of <u>what we want as childhoods</u> (**Delia**: right) <u>what we as adults have to, have the obligation *of*, providing</u> these childhoods with… more than a definition of a boy or a girl…

Ida asserts children should not be defined, beyond having 'projections for them'. By doing so, she seems to have equated the invitation to explore depictions of the child in the curriculum, with an attempt at, or at least with supporting the idea of rigidly defining them. I experienced this as a misunderstanding of my aim; however, I deliberately refrained from clarifying it, as my main interest was for them to elaborate their spontaneous responses to our exchanges. Delia utterly agrees with Ida, stating that defining the child would be the same as 'stereotyping them', imposing a disrespectful desire for 'all children [to be] like this'. In doing this, Delia seems not to

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[78] *Subject* of law/rights: formal status given to the child (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) as opposed to treating children as an *object* of law; that is, as being without capacity, in need of protection, and having no rights. *Subject of law* constitutes a core notion of the definition of the child in the Chilean EC curriculum.

notice how her previous conception of children as projections of becoming *well-rounded* adults, and future 'contributors' to society, could in fact entail quite specific desires for children. Ida then continues to elaborate on what a disservice would be to try to define the child, 'we would be shooting ourselves in the foot', which would go against any claim to adhere to principled views of 'children [as] subjects of law and in constant change'. Ida reiterates her adherence to having projections for children, 'of what we want as childhoods'. A certain paradox in Ida's discourse may be seen here; it can be argued there is a prescriptiveness to projecting 'what we want as childhoods', which is not all that different to defining children. Finally, she seems to be able to return to her aim of not defining children, adding that what should be projected is 'what we as adults have to (…) [provide] these childhoods with'. Delia continues Ida's phrase in a quite organic manner:

> **Delia**: …because in the end… the only real thing about defining a child (…) is that they is a human of law…
> **Ida**: from zero to nine years…
> **Delia**: from zero to nine… (**Ida**: right) it's the only thing… like (**Ida**: right) real and sustainable (**Ida**: right) and (unclear)
> **Ida**: and verifiable and-- measurable, let's say, that they is zero months, that they is one month old, and that we can prove, but, a definition as such, it's like… geez, it's like… that's why I tell you, here-- we don't allude at any point, with that definition, to what we uh talk about inclusion or diversity (**Coca**: mm) so, I think that, it wouldn't be of interest… I believe we should never define a boy or a girl, but rather let them define themselves based on what we as adults and society give them, which are these rights, that they have
> **Delia**: yes, I totally agree
> **Coca**: mm excellent
> **Delia**: Oh, I loved this session (laughs)

Delia and Ida's final exchange resembles one continuous utterance in which they complete each other sentences as they arrive at the end of their discussion. Delia, echoing an ontological claim, states that 'the only real [and sustainable] thing about defining a child is that they is a *human of law*', a rather odd phrasing (in Spanish) of the notion of *subject of law/rights*. Delia's emphasis on the *humanity* of the *child-subject*, may seek to underline the inalienability[79] of their rights. Ida complements Delia's description, posing children's age as the only *verifiable and measurable aspect* of the *reality* of the child. Approaching the end of this exchange and the overall session, Ida assumes the plural first-person point of view, e.g. 'we don't allude (…)'; 'what we talk about (…)'; 'we should never define (…)', speaking in the name of the *academic pair*, or of an even wider subject, possibly the EC profession as a whole. Ida's last remark about

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[79] Not being subject to being taken away from or given away by the possessor (EOD).

'(…) [letting children] define themselves based on what we (…) give them, which are these rights', may be slightly problematic when contrasted with the previously proposed inherence of children's rights, as in this case it is 'adults and society' who grant those rights to them.

3.3 Adding some layers

The prescriptiveness of this discourse, according to which, 'it wouldn't be of interest', 'we should never define a boy or a girl', resonates with a previous exchange that took place at around minute 15 of the session, in which Ida narrated her experience of recently attending a seminar on EC education:

> **Ida**: I went to a seminar about play, and they presented two studies (…) about EC educators' perspectives on play, right? So… very little play takes place at kindergartens, even less at schools, they described types of play… then there was this workshop, and in my group, we said '*Why do we have to be talking about play, when play is an intrinsic right*? It's like eating, you know? I mean yes, we can categorize play, adult-led, instructional, free play… but why would we have to discuss whether the child plays or not? Why should we question or structure something inherent to human being? We shouldn't question how children play, when they play, who they play with, what game they play, whether it has rules or not because… there are games with implicit rules and it is play anyway, you see? So, it was weird, very interesting but very weird… I felt like '*oh what a pity, to be questioning what a child…*' (…)
>
> **Delia**: (…) obviously, as you say, *[play]* is an inherent right, how, how are you going to take that part away of them, because it's intrinsic to them, it isn't like… '*They have a right to play*', it's like… '*They MUST play*!'

As seen, here Ida seems to equate the undertaking of research on play with a questioning of the inalienability of play as a children's right and with the prescription of what play should look like. Her adamant perspective seems to escalate quite quickly, to the point of virtually proscribing any possible research on the matter. In this quote, Ida's relation to research seems to exhibit an ambivalence, considering it at the same time 'very interesting but very weird', the latter arguably signalling something unfamiliar and potentially exciting, yet ultimately deeming it to be 'a pity'. Delia responded favourably to Ida's assertions, without engaging in openly rejecting research at any point though, maybe given her investment in it. Specifically, she strongly adhered to Ida's discourse on children's intrinsic right to play, to the point of rejecting any mediation of the relation between children and play by a notion of *right*; 'it isn't like… They have a right to play (…) They MUST play!' This exchange lasted about five minutes, during which Ida and Delia continued developing this argument in constant and complete agreement with each other. In hindsight, at that moment I deemed Ida's intervention to be quite unexpected given her positive attitude towards

research throughout the previous sessions. Ida had previously described attending research seminars, often considering them (and research as a whole) to be very useful: '(...) research has contributed so much to our discipline (...)'. Considering the above, I suggest that this exchange is an instance of a discourse that became somewhat extreme, largely because of its co-construction in the context of Ida and Delia's emerging dyadic functioning, and whose strength and cohesiveness seemed to rely on both Ida and Delia presenting themselves to each other as principled, uncompromising educators. In this sense, Ida may have not have completely disapproved of all research on play. Instead, it may have been a *necessary* discourse instrumental to the emergence of Delia and Ida's incipient alliance which, half an hour later, paradoxically bonded them in a shared love for research.

Ida and Delia share deterministic views on children who they perceive to be profoundly vulnerable as a result of the negligence of adults. They seem to try to escape this painful image of children by envisioning quite elusive yet idealised *pure becoming* trajectories for them. Certain contradictions may be seen in their reluctance to engage with any possible definition or exploration of the notion of the child. In common with everyone else, Ida and Delia's views on children are inexorably informed by definitions of the child, even if these are provisional. Their imagined trajectories for children therefore unavoidably entail having (from an adult perspective) expectations for them. By the end of the exchange, the plain declaration of aspects of the child which cannot even be 'talked about', seems to seal Ida and Delia's joint, almost extreme *over*-principled discourse, arguably instrumental to their consolidation as a strong cohesive dyad.

4. Conclusions

4.1 Summary

This chapter has explored the potential of the psychoanalytic notions of intersubjective thirdness and projective identification to produce helpful insights in the analysis of the production of a dyadic free-associative discourse. Throughout the analysed session, Delia and Ida seemed to foster a joint desire for an extra-classroom EC practice. My exploration of this desire through the concept of thirdness suggested that they emerged as a dyad, allied towards the aim of research. In response to the potential overwhelmingness of EC education, this search for the creation of something new arguably offered them an escape from their fantasised destructiveness and the concomitant loss of desire for the classroom.

My analysis of their dialogue also identified a tension between an inquisitive disposition towards the exploration of EC knowledge, crucial to sustaining Ida and Delia's idealised 'researcher' self-image, and an engagement with strong normative discourses on the child which might precisely compromise their idealised self-concept of being an academic pair. Those moments in which Delia and Ida's discourse became tightly knitted, almost impenetrable, seemingly sought to sustain an appearance of similarity, critical to the dyadic functioning. However, cracks in their shared discourse - for instance, the claim to prioritise research while rejecting the problematisation of notions like the child or play, and ultimately asserting that there is nothing more important than classroom practice - revealed its lack of cohesion. While Ida and Delia's engagement and investments in EC education were probably quite different, the dyadic functioning may have armed them with a strong and unified, yet possibly transitory, identity formation to cope with some of the negative aspects of EC practice.

An intensive use of projective identification may have helped maintain the illusion of sameness through the blurring of subjective limits and concomitant emergence of the *subject of projective identification*. In relation to this, it can be argued that it is not that there is a prior subjectivity that engages in these dynamics, but rather that the EC educator subjectivity is produced in these dynamics. In this sense, the sustaining of an illusion of sameness between two subjectivities does not constitute an aim in itself, being instrumental instead to the emergence of the subject of projective identification, by intensifying the affective dynamics in which the latter is produced.

4.2 Concluding reflections

This chapter has explored two instances of the free-associative discourse produced by two EC educators. It explored their views on the child, the implications of these views for their practice, and the concomitant emergence of an unconscious alliance between them.

My close analysis of the affectively intense dialogue between these educators has shown how a discussion, initially about representations of the child in the EC curriculum, quickly evolved into a deep consideration of the emotionally onerous aspects of their practice. They demonstrated awareness of the marked affective dimension of their practice and the challenges it poses to educators, often demanding from them a very sophisticated type of psychical work. For educators, this psychical work crucially involves, among other things, a constant self-observation of their capacity to process the emotional intensity of the EC profession and the development

of a coherent professional identity as a source of purpose and strength to navigate the uncertainties of a complex professional practice. As summarised above, the educators admitted the possibility for EC practice to be experienced as overwhelming and stated their belief that it would be necessary to leave the classroom if this were to happen. This necessity was based on a fear of their own destructiveness and a view of children as very vulnerable subjects which, through my analysis, I have suggested were some of the predominant fantasies that underlay this strict position-taking; a loss of desire for the classroom was the inevitable consequence of this predicament.

In order to face such difficult aspects of EC practice, the educators embarked on the subjectifying project of developing a shared strong 'researcher' identity, taking as a starting point an idealised love for research and a desire to find professional meaning outside the EC classroom. Using the concept of the intersubjective third, I interpreted this as the emergence of a cohesive unconscious alliance, under the illusion of sharing the same aims and desires. The analysis suggested the way that, through the advancement of an uncompromising discourse especially about the child, the participants mutually strengthened each other and were instrumental to sustaining the desired professional identity. However, the obtained idealised researcher self-image, while temporarily satisfactory, ultimately proved to be problematic as fissures in the very discourses that sustained it were revealed. For instance, the contradiction between refusing to define the child and having a myriad of 'becoming' expectations of them, and the interpretation of research on play as questioning play's inalienability as a children's right. The undisputed emergence of such contested discourses in the dyadic context, discourses often individually disavowed by the educators, shows how the substance of the discussion can be side-lined by the aims and needs of the emergent relationship.

In the context of their exchange and demonstrated by the intensity of their discourse, the educators both articulated an experience of excessive affect in their practice and enacted it within the dyad. Negative affect that had arguably been censored in previous sessions seemed to find expression in this dyadic context. For example, a previous discussion that had exclusively conceptualised vocation as 'enchantment', managed to be resumed and problematised through the notion of 'disenchantment' as a possible engagement with EC practice. As before, this could be an indication of the educators' continuing processing of unconscious contents between sessions. Similarly, the intense circulation of affect arguably animated a significant use of projective identification, whose temporary blurring of subjective boundaries was probably instrumental to the

creation and strengthening of the illusion of sameness that sustained the dyad, and the subsequent emergence of the subject of projective identification. As suggested before, it is not a matter of two discrete subjectivities entering the dynamics of the subject of projective identification, but rather that a shared professional subjectivity emerged from the affective mobilisation of this encounter. As seen, the psychoanalytic conceptual framework of intersubjectivity - especially the notions of projective identification and thirdness - have allowed me to produce a detailed interpretation of complex unconscious dynamics.

I have also suggested that the dyadic functioning observed in this session resonates with the group theory notion of *pairing*. In pairing two group members engage in a reproductive fantasy in search of confirmation of their selves in the relation with the other; a definition that accurately applies to these educators' joint creation of an imagined professional subjectivity. While in a classic group context pairing takes place as a means to preserve the group, which provides the pair with full attention and security, it has been proposed (above) that pairing can also take place outside a 'literal' group situation. This perspective supports my interpretation of the educators' functioning as pairing in the context of an internalised group process and sustained by my witnessing of their reproductive activity as a surrogate of the full group's attention. In this sense, the pairing activity may also have aimed to preserve the existence of the absent group.

My detailed analysis of the way in which educators make sense of the emotional aspects of their practice, and how these aspects inform their negotiation of multiple discourses on professionalism and vocation, illuminates both the complexity of the formation of these professional subjectivities and the performative aspects that emerge when producing an account of them. My foregrounding of the relation that emerged between the educators, through tracing moments of overlap interwoven within their free-associative discourse, has allowed me to show the primacy of a relational function over the 'actual' meanings or senses of given instances of discourse, ultimately highlighting the transformative potential of the methodology itself, in its enabling of an intersubjective relation from which to explore professional subjectivities.

THEMATIC DISCUSSION: Negotiating professional knowledge in EC education

Introduction

In what follows, I consider the educators' accounts of their relation to professional knowledge and its role in EC education. The educators discussed this subject throughout all the sessions, emphasising content and pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge about the child as indispensable pillars of their practice. This topic was at the core of the shared discourse produced by Ida and Delia (analysed in the previous chapter), to whom a 'flight into' professional knowledge seemed to offer a means to both cope with emotionally menacing aspects of EC practice, and a way to reimagine their overall engagement with EC education.

As seen in the previous chapter, it is possible to identify the production of an, at times, idealised discourse on EC educators' knowledge. I suggest that the educators' relation to this discourse is instrumental to sustaining a narrative of the uniqueness of their labour, and of EC education as a flourishing discipline (characterised by a clear ethos and specialised knowledge). This relation was crucial to their developing a strong professional identity and to assert themselves within the sphere of education and the wider social world, which seems to still struggle to see EC education's value and importance.

In order to develop this argument, in the first section of the discussion I map the particular characteristics of EC educator's knowledge and its relation to other fields, as defined by the educators. In relation to this, their views both confirm and problematise the literature's suggestion that EC education does not fit with traditional understandings of professionalism. The second section identifies the distinctive relation that the educators claim to have to this singular professional knowledge. I describe the way in which this relation seems to permeate their professional identities and, in agreement with the literature, the importance of the role of passion and the direct engagement with very young children in the construction of these identities. This distinctive relation to knowledge is, however, in tension with the personal and structural doubt invested in EC education, as described in the literature; a tension that seems to give the educators' engagement with knowledge an instrumental, self-affirming role.

The unique knowledge of EC educators

In this section, I illustrate some participants' accounts of what they conceive as EC educators' holistic understanding of the child. This understanding draws partly on interdisciplinary research in the field, and appears to be bolstered by the EC curriculum.

Throughout the interview sessions, the educators described how society seemingly has a compartmentalised view of the human being; a societal structural problem that goes beyond impoverished views of the child in the school context:

> I don't know if it's a social, cultural problem, or definitely... it goes beyond education, this issue of fragmenting the human being, we educators have the blessing of seeing the human being in a holistic way (**Blanca**, S1: the term EC education)

Participants did not elaborate on their understandings of the term *holistic*, seeming to use it as if it was a univocal, descriptive term. From their perspective, children's multidimensionality and holistic qualities would be exclusively acknowledged and worked with by EC educators:

> We have that comprehensive perspective. There is a holistic formation of the child in EC education *[but]* from there on... that is lost. *[Schools]* would only boost certain characteristics of children, not all of them, not the complementariness of the human being (**Violeta**, S1: the term EC education)

As seen, the holistic approach to the education of children would be lost when they leave EC education and enter the school system, where only some specific aspects of their formation will be emphasised. The educators in the study further attributed this distinctive, comprehensive view of the child to the increasing formalisation and interdisciplinarity of EC education as a field, whose contributions have enriched the understanding of children in recent years:

> Now there's a more comprehensive vision *[of EC education]*, before it was just us *[EC educators]*, who took care of children from three months to six years... now there is other people *[involved]* too, research has done a lot *[in this respect]* it has contributed so much, the introduction of neuroscience, there is a before and after with neuroscience (**Ida**, S5: pedagogical biography)

The perception of benefiting from the involvement of other professionals in EC may indicate educators are not always concerned with establishing clear professional boundaries. This agrees with the suggestion in the literature that EC education does not 'fit' with traditional understandings of professionalism (Osgood, 2010; Taggart, 2011; Warren, 2014 etc.), characterised by the assertion of professional borders and the attempt to control who may practice (Moss, 2006). In contrast to this, it bears

remembering that (as seen in the previous thematic discussion) the educators could be quite invested in setting boundaries *within* EC education practice to differentiate school-based practice from 'proper' EC education. At the same time, a traditional notion of professionalism characterised by specialised knowledge does seem relevant to EC practice. While this may not necessarily be an intended state, it is the way educators currently see their field, seeing themselves as the bearers of a privileged knowledge about the child. The national EC curriculum was mentioned as an important source that informed their specialised knowledge:

> You have to be constantly studying for the sake of *[the children]*, the new curricular guidelines were just launched, and you should know them by heart... right? Even if they still don't fully take effect... they gave us one more year *[to implement them]* (**Amelia**: but you have to be up to date) yes, you have to be up to date (**Rafaela**, S5: pedagogical biography)

The perception of the national curriculum as having the potential to support important aspects of EC practice was expressed by the educators at different points in their discussions, as seen in the previous thematic analysis. Then, they described the curriculum as a crucial point of reference where certainty and affirmation of the role of the EC educator could be found. The perceived importance of the curriculum created the professional obligation for educators to become extremely knowledgeable about it.

As seen in this section, the educators' perspectives reveal a unique take on professionalism which is not particularly concerned with setting clear boundaries in relation to other EC-related disciplines but simultaneously considers specialised professional knowledge indispensable.

The subjectifying effects of EC educators' relation to knowledge

In this section I discuss the distinctive ways in which the educators think their relation to EC knowledge shapes their professional identity, characterising themselves as particularly motivated and industrious professionals. In agreement with the literature, they consider their high motivation a product of the passion elicited by the experiential aspects of their close relation to the child, once again hinting at wider understandings of professionalism. This self-confident view of their role both coexists with, and is a response to, a prevalent lack of validation of the profession.

The participants described EC educators as being distinctively open to new developments in the field and having a willingness to embrace a research-informed practice, using it as a tool for professional development:

> Research has contributed so much to our discipline, and I believe that we, as EC educators, we have taken that leap, we have taken this (...) and made it our own, and we have kept improving. I don't think it is the case with the primary education people, I think they are still... (**Blanca**: yes, they are... reluctant) because they are... you mentioned it, we have always been and will always be the most industrious... in my kindergarten for example, we are always up to date... unlike, other educational levels where always... it's always a problem... whereas EC educators by essence, we are more (**Eva**: self-motivated) and mindful... (**Ida**, S5: pedagogical biography)

This depiction of EC educators as industrious, highly motivated professionals who exhibit a distinctive passion for their work resonates with descriptions of the EC workforce in the literature (Moyles, 2001). This professional self-definition of EC educators seems to emerge in opposition to a negative view of primary teachers, who would be 'reluctant' to engage with newly available knowledge. This is consistent with the participants' perception of kindergarten-based EC education as better than the EC education that schools can provide, mostly because they possess a knowledge of EC that schools lack.

The following depiction of EC practice corroborates definitions of professionalism in EC education, as per the literature, as the capacity of being fully present, creative and agentic (Dalli, 2011):

> (...) I always say educators are privileged, we are there with our ears, our sight, with the sensations, with a look, I believe that we have that great privilege to develop all those senses with our children (**Ida**: besides, we have more freedom) we have everything, we have all the tools to (...) to generate so many things (**Blanca**, S2: the term 'párvulo')

Likewise, this description echoes some of the claims made in the literature about the high levels of physical and personal knowledge and abilities that EC practice demands from EC educators (Manning-Morton, 2006).

In spite of all the above, given the way they have historically been perceived by society, especially by other professionals, the professional confidence described has not always come easy for EC educators:

> We as educators have felt deeply questioned (...) but I also feel that, we are also a bit guilty (**Ida**: Yes, we have also allowed) we have allowed it through the work we have done, in the way we have presented it, in the way that, in front of another professional, we are not capable of, of asserting ourselves and, sometimes, of validating our work... (**Blanca**, S1: the term EC education)

While describing having felt professionally questioned, Blanca stated her view of educators being partly responsible for this because they fail to demonstrate the value of their work assertively. As Taggart (2011) suggests, this is the double-bind that many

educators find themselves in: EC educators must navigate inconsistent societal discourses that demand credentials and professionalism from them while offering scarce support and few opportunities to exercise the demanded professional autonomy. The participants described how, in order to assert themselves professionally and gain external validation, educators must constantly cultivate themselves and be ready to demonstrate their knowledge of their field. A changing educational landscape and a perception of the 'children of today' as being more challenging are some of the drivers of this increasing professionalisation:

> There have been changes in EC education in Chile that have made us as EC educators (...) to look for opportunities to prepare for these children of today (...) we've made sure to prepare ourselves a lot more, to study more, to search, to be informed about different instances of... how we can strengthen our work with the children, what are the most suitable learnings for certain ages, for certain contexts in which they live (**Violeta**, S2: the term 'párvulo')

In this way, the focus of desired professional improvement seems to revolve around acquiring a contextualised view of how children learn, attending to their developmental stages and living circumstances. As seen in this section, the educators' strong self-assertion may constitute a response to the historical devaluation of the EC profession, in which educators actively work to fulfil their own views of what constitutes a capable EC professional. Their view of EC education's strengthening as a field, as a result of its association with scientific disciplines like neuroscience, seems to add a further layer of validation to their practice.

This brief discussion has allowed me to reinforce my suggestion of an identitary function to the educators' relation to EC knowledge, identifying some of the particular understandings of professionalism it denotes. These understandings both expand traditional views of professionalism - as seen in the educators' absence of a particular concern for setting clear professional borders - and preserve some of its aspects, like a marked emphasis on possessing highly specialised knowledge.

CHAPTER 7

What happens in a one-participant session: a different kind of thirdness

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the one-to-one interaction that took place between one of the educators, Amelia, and myself, in one of the free-associative interviews. This was the third of the six-session series I conducted with each group; the prompt was 'bring something that reminds you/makes you think of *the child*'[80]. The one-to-one format of the session was unplanned, thus challenging and initially disappointing given my research's main interest in group processes. The format affected my role in the session demanding a mode of intervention very different from the one I adopted in group sessions. I took a direct role in sustaining Amelia's discourse, deliberately containing it by the end of the session.

As seen in the two previous chapters, having a different number of participants seemed to give a distinctive character to each free-associative session, arguably stimulating particular modes of discourse production, affective expression and use of unconscious mechanisms, among other aspects. In this sense, a one-participant session offered the opportunity to further examine this suggestion. Amelia seemed to engage in plentiful free-associations with a largely biographical character, in what resembled a deep introspective process, while demonstrating an awareness of the different quality of the setting, which arguably affected her engagement with the session. Through the analysis developed in this chapter, I argue that Amelia's artefact - a doll- fulfilled an intensified signifying function for her; as seen in the complex temporality of her relation to her doll, and the subjectifying effects of her narration of this relation.

The chapter comprises three main sections. The first two sections, 'Birth of the doll as a signifier' and 'The creation of a tertiary space' explore Amelia's elaboration on her artefact in the context of the free associative task. Each of these two sections is organised around an analysis of two extracts whose order of presentation coincides with their chronological appearance during the session. As in the previous chapters, I

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[80] When phrasing this prompt, the verbs *represent/symbolise* were deliberately avoided, as they may suggest an already intellectually mediated approach to the task. Instead, the less specific verbs *remind you/think of* were used, in the hope they would allow participants to explore diverse, not only intellectualised, modes of relation to their chosen artefacts.

analyse each extract descriptively, and then introduce relevant conceptual tools including the notions of signifier, afterwardsness, transitional object and transitional space, and thirdness. Both sections finish with a conceptual discussion relevant to the analysed data.

The third section, 'Thirdness in a one-participant session', addresses the one-to-one format and its methodological and intersubjective implications, with a special focus on my role and mode of intervention during the session. My aim is to provide a detailed account of the type of content that can emerge in a *one-participant/two person* session, and of the notably different character that a session of this type can take. I deliberately present this methodological discussion after having introduced the data that was generated during the session; knowing beforehand the kind of material that was produced will allow a richer consideration of its mode of production. I end the chapter with a brief thematic discussion on the role of maternal love in EC education, a topic especially thematised by Amelia during this session.

About the session

All the discussions I analyse in this chapter took place during the third session of the *morning group* (composed by Amelia, Rafaela, Violeta and Juana). As mentioned above, the prompt that organised the session was the sharing and discussion of artefacts brought by the participants, that reminded them/made them think of *the child*. I initially expected it to be a two-participant session, as Juana and Violeta had excused themselves in advance. However, moments before the session Rafaela got in touch to excuse herself as well, as she was ill. Thus, the only participant that attended the session was Amelia, who had worked as a special needs teacher for 12 years with four and five year-olds.

1. Birth of the doll as a signifier

In this section, I discuss two specific extracts that took place during the first quarter of the session. In the first one ('A big-eyed doll'), Amelia firstly presents her artefact, a doll, while in the second extract ('A doll named Mickey'), she elaborates on the origin of the name of the doll. The main point I develop in this section is the consideration of Amelia's doll as an overdetermined signifier whose emergence can be explained, among several unconscious dynamics, by the process of afterwardsness.

Amelia introduced her artefact in a notably rich manner, suggesting an intense affective mobilisation. The fact that the artefact had belonged to Amelia since her childhood and

that she had kept it close across the years gave the session a markedly biographical character. My interpretation of different layers of meaning allowed me to explore how Amelia's artefact emerged as an overdetermined signifier by means of a process of retrosignification. The main meanings of the artefact seem to be a representation of the father, and of the mode of being of childhood; and its main retrospective movements seemingly are the development of mothering towards the artefact, and the multiple object relations it embodied. I firstly present both extracts, and then put forward the notions of 'overdetermination' and 'afterwardsness' to be explored. Finally, in subsection 1.3, I provide a fuller conceptual discussion of both extracts as a whole. As I develop later in the chapter, these different relations signified by Amelia's artefact significantly shaped the production of her professional subjectivity.

1.1 A big-eyed doll

The following is a three minutes long extract, starting on minute four of the session. Consisting of a single continuous utterance, it comprises Amelia first description of her artefact, a doll (for a picture of the artefact, please see Appendix 4), brought by her as a response to the prompt 'bring something that reminds you/makes you think of *the child*' (please see the full extract on the next page[81]):

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[81] I will present the complete extracts on the same page whenever possible.

Full extract

> I brought this (takes something out of her purse) (**Coca**: great), this is of course mine,
> it's a doll that reminds me of my childhood, alright? My dad gave me this doll for my
> birthday when I was six, seven years old, and I kept it uhm, because it reminds me of
> my dad... my dad passed away... in 2015 (**Coca**: mmm) and it was the most precious
> gift I got from him (**Coca**: I see) because he... I'm-- I'm more than 40 years old now...
> and, I remember that back then there were these dolls called *pepones*, these big... and
> he couldn't buy one because we were five siblings (**Coca**: I see) we struggled
> financially a lot, but he was always there for us, you know? And I remember him
> telling me *'Look, I wasn't able to buy you the famous pepón doll, but I brought you this
> one'*. Anyway I, even though I was still little I appreciated his gesture uh? It also
> reminds me of playing with my siblings, we played mom and dad, we played *house*
> (laughs) (**Coca**: laughs) I sat this doll at the table, and we would do everything around
> this *'mono' [doll]* ... around the toys my siblings had as well (...) And then, when I grew
> up and went to Uni to study I said '*Ah, I engaged in symbolic play with my brother, in
> functional play',* but beyond that knowledge, uh it was about-- playing, also about
> emotion, which reminds me of my dad. I mean... I always, every day I remember my
> dad for different reasons (breathes in) but when you sent me the email, the first thing
> I said, without even thinking about it, believe me, without thinking about it I said
> '*alright, I'll bring the doll...*' and... this doll connects me a lot with my childhood; first,
> because of the paternal factor, of my father; secondly, because of play, this playful
> vibe with my siblings, the five of us playing together, I laid the *'mono' [doll]* down, on
> newspapers (laughs) laid on the floor... uh, my brother would be the dad-- the role of
> my dad... and, that was it (**Coca**: I see) a beautiful time (...) and the other thing... as I
> said, it was very emotive because... uh this *'mono' [doll]* reminds me a lot of this
> gesture of my dad... and... I don't know how to say this... uhm, that loss, death is a loss
> uhm and it makes me very sad (**Coca**: mm, almost inaudible) and... this is like the, the
> memento I keep of him... of that childhood... and... that's why I brought it because... is
> what I remember with deep emotion... of that moment... I don't know if... (laughs)
> sorry (tears flow down her face, digs into her purse for a tissue) (**Coca**: stands up and
> reaches to grab a napkin from the other side of the table, *'here...'*, hands napkin to
> Amelia) don't worry, I have tissues (**Coca**: 'do you have...? here, just in...', leaves the
> napkin on the table near Amelia) pardon me (laughs) (**Coca**: don't mention it...)

A first glimpse

As seen in the beginning of the extract, Amelia interpreted the prompt's reference to
children as a question about *her* childhood. This was not an uncommon reading of the
task in the overall context of the group sessions, as four out of the six participants who
shared an artefact in response to this activity interpreted it in the same manner:

I brought this (takes something out of her purse) (**Coca**: great), this is of course mine, it's a doll that <u>reminds me of my childhood</u>[82], alright? My dad gave me this doll for my birthday when I was six, seven years old, and I kept it uhm, because it <u>reminds me of my dad</u>... <u>my dad passed away</u>... in 2015 (**Coca**: mmm) and it was <u>the most precious gift I got from him</u> (**Coca**: I see[83]) because he... I'm-- I'm more than 40 years old now... and, I remember that back then there were these dolls called *pepones*[84], these big... and he couldn't buy one because we were five siblings (**Coca**: I see) we struggled financially a lot, but he was always there for us, you know? And I remember him telling me *'Look, <u>I wasn't able to buy you the famous pepón doll, but I brought you this one'</u>*. Anyway I, <u>even though I was still little I appreciated his gesture</u> uh?

After stating the doll reminded her of her childhood, Amelia devoted the first third of her utterance to describe the doll's origin and relation to her father. A present from him for her birthday, the doll seems to represent both the father and his recent demise, three years before these sessions. The doll, *the most precious gift* Amelia got from her father, may have constituted an affordable alternative to the expensive *pepón* doll every Chilean child in the late seventies and early eighties wanted to have. In this sense, it can be argued the doll is so dear to Amelia as it represents her father's effort, in times of financial struggle, to meet her child-self's desire. Amelia's *pepón* desire was not exactly met, yet her father's will to fulfil it seems to have been materialised in the doll; a *gesture* Amelia claims to have already acknowledged in that very moment, 'even though [she] was still little'. Then, Amelia briefly described how the doll reminds her of playing with her siblings in what she retrospectively characterises as *symbolic, functional* play, emphasising though that what is important about play is affection:

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[82] As explained before, I underline words or phrases that were central to my interpretations of the material.

[83] Translation of the Spanish word *ya*. Often translated as yes or okay; its meaning changes depending on intonation. When uttered slowly, in a soft tone of voice, it may mean *'I see', 'I understand'* or *'I hear you.'*

[84] Big-eyed. *Pepones* dolls were very popular among children in Chile, between the late seventies and early eighties.

It also reminds me of playing with my siblings, we played mom and dad, we played *house* (laughs) (**Coca**: laughs) I sat this doll at the table, and we would do everything around this *'mono' [doll]*[85]... around the toys my siblings had as well (...) And then, when I grew up and went to Uni to study I said '*Ah, I engaged in symbolic play with my brother, in functional play',* but beyond that knowledge, uh it was about-- playing, also about emotion, which reminds me of my dad. I mean... I always, every day I remember my dad for different reasons (breathes in) but when you sent me the email, the first thing I said, without even thinking about it, believe me, without even thinking about it I said '*alright, I'll bring the doll...*' and... this doll connects me a lot with my childhood; first, because of the paternal factor, of my father; secondly, because of play, this playful vibe with my siblings, the five of us playing together, I laid the *'mono' [doll]* down, on newspapers (laughs) laid on the floor... uh, my brother would be the dad-- the role of my dad... and, that was it (**Coca**: I see) a beautiful time (...)

It is worth noting that this was the first time Amelia called the doll 'mono', a generic term in Spanish which may constitute a slightly colder, more detached way to refer to the doll. Immediately afterwards, Amelia's narration goes back to her father; 'every day I remember my dad for different reasons (breathes in) but when you sent me the email (...) without even thinking about it I said 'alright, I'll bring the doll...''. Amelia's adversative use of *but* in this phrase, may signal an acknowledgment of her participation in these sessions and/or of the doll itself as offering a unique way of remembering her father, potentially different from the way she remembers him daily. She then offers an astute, hierarchised summary of why the doll allows her to establish such a strong connection to her childhood; ultimately, why it is so important to her, 'first, because of the paternal factor [and] secondly, because of play'. The *playful vibe* that circulated among Amelia and her siblings was enacted when they played *house*, during which Amelia's brother played the role not of *any dad* but *her dad*, as Amelia promptly rectified. She then resumes the idea of the doll as representing her father's loving gesture:

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[85] Here Amelia used the Spanish word *'mono'* (which literally translates to *monkey*) instead of *doll*. As described in the Methodology chapter, *'mono'* is a generic term used in Chile to refer to anthropomorphic and zoomorphic toys, e.g. dolls, teddy bears, action figures, etc. It can also be used to refer to animated cartoons, a drawing, a rough sketch on a piece of paper, etc. I will mark every time Amelia calls her doll *'mono'*, as this use may connote a particular affective nuance I will address below.

> (...) and the other thing... as I said, it was very emotive because... uh this *'mono' [doll]* reminds me a lot of this gesture of my dad... and... <u>I don't know how to say this... uhm, that loss, death is a loss uhm and it makes me very sad</u> (**Coca**: mm, almost inaudible) and... this is like the, <u>the memento[86] I keep of him... of that childhood</u>... and... that's why I brought it because... is what I remember with deep emotion... of that moment... I don't know if... (<u>laughs</u>) sorry (<u>tears flow down her face</u>, digs into her purse for a tissue) (**Coca**: stands up and reaches to grab a napkin from the other side of the table, *'here...'*, hands napkin to Amelia) don't worry, I have tissues (**Coca**: 'do you have...? here, just in...', leaves the napkin on the table near Amelia) pardon me (laughs) (**Coca**: don't mention it...)

As previously outlined, the doll, wishfully just a *'mono'* to Amelia at this point, functions both as a reminder of her father's gesture, and of his absence. In this sense, the doll captures something ineffable ('I don't know how to say this'), Amelia's sadness about the loss of death. By the end of her utterance, she plainly restates the importance of the doll as a memento of her father and her childhood; the evocation of her past elicits in her a deep emotion. Finally, Amelia got teary-eyed between soft laughter and mild apologies, finding the tissues to dry her tears herself; my response consisting in clumsily producing more paper tissues. We remained silent for a while after this tearful moment, after which Amelia spontaneously resumed her narration.

Adding some layers

As Amelia's discourse reveals, her doll condenses multiple meanings for her and thus acts as a signifier. Lacan understood signifiers as basic units of language which do not have a univocal or fixed meaning. Instead, their meaning changes referentially, according to their relative position in the signifying chain (Evans, 2008, p. 189). The way Amelia's doll came to encompass plentiful meanings can be understood as a process of afterwardsness, which I will conceptualise in the discussion on *the birth of the signifier* in subsection 1.3. For now, I will describe it as an ongoing process that has been taking place since the moment Amelia was given the doll, even until the present time. Amelia provides a narrative about what these meanings are, and the order in which (that is, when) they emerged and were attached to the doll. She firstly states the doll represents for her both her father, and more generally childhood, especially play. Amelia's father had died three years before our session, thus the doll's role of signifying him became even more important; it does not just represent this father, it represents a father who is not around anymore.

Amelia claims the doll to be *the most precious gift* she got from her father; it was the materialisation of his will to fulfil her desire of a doll in spite of his not being able to

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[86] Amelia's literal expression was '*material memory*'.

produce the specific doll of Amelia's desire. She claims to have given that meaning to the doll already at that moment, *even though [she] was still little.* As processes of meaning attribution tend to be complex and iterative, it is possible that this meaning was not completely implanted in Amelia's childhood, thus a certain retrosignification may have also been involved in its constitution. Simultaneously, Amelia's mention of play as an important meaning the doll holds for her, seems to be subjugated to its function of representing the father. This can be seen in her description of her brother's role when playing house: he did not play the role of a generic dad, but of *their* dad. Amelia seems to be aware of this hierarchy, in relation to what the doll means. Firstly, she says, there is a *paternal factor* at play; and only in second place, there is the representation of play. By the end of this extract, the doll seems to further offer an open signifier onto which more elusive meanings are also projected. Here, the ineffability of the loss that death represents becomes something that can begin to be discerned; largely signalled by the mobilisation of affect, as seen in Amelia's tearfulness when, she '[doesn't] know how to say this'.

1.2 A doll named Mickey

The following is a three minute long extract, starting on minute 11 of the session. The extract was prompted by my question about the doll's name. In hindsight, and as corroborated by my field notes, when posing the question I did not have a specific interest in the story behind the doll's name. My main aim was simply to stimulate Amelia's further elaboration on her artefact:

Full extract

    Coca: what else comes to… when you think of… what shall we call it/him? This baby?

    Amelia: I named him (laughs)… the thing is that my dad was called Miguel (**Coca**: uhum) and he said, '*let's give him a name*', because he was super close to *'nosotras' [us]*, more than my mom, I must admit, uh… he was very present for us… he always… my mom to this day, says we loved him more than her (**Coca**: mm) so my dad said *'let's name the 'monos' [dolls]'*, not only mine, but also my sister's… so… we named this *'mono' [doll]* Michael (laughs), then we named him Mickey, you know? So… we had like two names, in the end uh… I called him Mickey because it was easier to me, but… starting from that… uhm, for example I tell you sometimes I see him so dirty and I clean him… I wash-- I even washed his clothes to bring him here (laughs out loud) so there is like… a caring… seriously, I keep him in a shelf in my bedroom… there, put away, he's always there in the bedroom… and I show it to my daughter who is 22 already, my older one, she says '*Oh it's so nice, and it's this and it's that*', she even says '*the material…the material isn't the same as… the one of the dolls they make now*' (**Coca**: mmm) '*and the clothes… they're kind of… kind of different too*', and… I don't know what else would you like me to tell you

    Coca: uhm… what else comes to mind… we-- we can be in silence for a while…

    Amelia: mmm (pause) you say… what comes to mind on the instant? (**Coca**: yes…) all right!… this is my *'mono' [doll]*… an important part of my life, as I told you, because my dad gave it to me uh, I remember him, I evoke him… uh, I think of the moments, the beautiful memories we had, I think about my childhood, about playing, doing crazy things, laying him down on the floor (laughs) I don't know, *[playing with water and]* getting it wet at some point… uh… holding him in my arms… and now that I am this old, I think it was at that moment uh… It's a crazy thing what I'm going to say (breathes in) but… it was like being the *'mono' [doll]*'s mom (laughs out loud) you know? And that, to be his mom… to have taken care of him… protected him… uh, to be there with him… mmm, and that craziness uh… is, kind of, part of what one does in life now, see? Protecting your children, feeding them… caressing them-- uh talking to them, and if we bring this to the work sphere, with children, it is sort of the same (…) your question made me reflect on that… that it was the first experience of protecting someone

A first glimpse

My wish to stimulate Amelia's associations is evidenced in my unplanned leap from 'what shall we call it/him' to 'this baby', which can be interpreted as a first step within this interaction, towards the personification of the doll. This may be the first time at which I clearly engage in the creation of Amelia's fantasy. Amelia provided a rich narrative on the matter in response:

Coca: what else comes to… when you think of… what shall we call it/him[87]? <u>This baby</u>?

Amelia: I named him (laughs)… the thing is that <u>my dad was called Miguel</u>[88] (**Coca**: uhum) and he said, '*let's give him a name*', because he was super close to *'nosotras' [us]*[89], more than my mom, I must admit, uh… he was very present for us… he always… <u>my mom to this day, says we loved him more than her</u> (**Coca**: mm) so my dad said *'let's name the 'monos' [dolls]'*, not only mine, but also my sister's… so… <u>we named this *'mono' [doll]* Michael (laughs), then we named him Mickey</u>, you know? So… we had like two names, in the end uh… I called him Mickey because it was easier to me….

Amelia's first remarks consist of her father's name, and the fact that he is the one who suggested naming the doll. She attributes her father's playful proposal to him 'being super close' to Amelia and her sister. This is followed by the slightly tangential description of how Amelia's mother thinks her children loved their father more than her, a claim that Amelia does not refute. The doll is first called Michael although Amelia will end up using Mickey, a common abbreviation of Michael. As noted in footnote 88, Miguel is the Spanish for Michael, thus the doll was named -in a scarcely disguised manner - after Amelia's father. Amelia's laughter may signal a certain shyness about this fact. Now Amelia's mother's observation makes sense; the doll was named after the parent who was loved the most. Amelia then proceeds to describe her present relation to the doll:

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[87] As explained in the Methodology chapter, *it/him* are possible translations of the Spanish word *le*, neutral third person singular (that can also be a suffix), which can also mean *her*. There are at least 20 instances in this extract, in which I had to decide whether to translate this word/suffix to *it* or *him*. Concurrently, the decision to use *him* instead of *her* was completely clear, as Amelia always used masculine articles and pronouns when a gendered use was demanded, e.g. '*I clean him', '(…) taking care of him'*, etc. She also always used masculine nouns and adjectives, e.g. '*the [masculine] doll'*, '*the [masculine] mono'*, etc., in which case gender must be always specified. The more personificative (i.e. characterized by or involving personification, EOD) Amelia's description of the doll, the more inclined I felt to choose to translate to *him*, over *it*. For instance, when Amelia describes showing the doll to her daughter I translate '*I show <u>it</u> to [her]'*, whereas when she refers to being the doll's mom, I translate '*to be <u>his</u> mom'*. I deem the doll, in the first example, to be more of a toy, while in the second case it may be closer to a child.

[88] Spanish for Michael.

[89] Translation of the Spanish *nosotras*, feminine first person plural. Thus, Amelia in this case refers only to her sister and her.

...starting from that... uhm, for example I tell you sometimes <u>I see him so dirty and I clean him</u>... I wash-- <u>I even washed his clothes to bring him here (laughs out loud)</u> so there is like... a caring... seriously, <u>I keep him in a shelf in my bedroom</u>... there, <u>put away</u>, he's <u>always there in the bedroom</u>... and I show it to my daughter who is 22 already, my older one, she says '*Oh it's so nice, and it's this and it's that*', she even says '*the material...<u>the material isn't the same as... the one of the dolls they make now</u>*' (**Coca**: mmm) '*and <u>the clothes... they're kind of... kind of different too</u>*', and... <u>I don't know what else would you like me to tell you</u>

Amelia confesses that sometimes she cleans the doll admitting that she 'even washed his clothes to bring him' to the session. Her laughter after disclosing this may indicate an awareness of how normative views about the way adults should engage with play-related objects might view her relation to her doll to be somewhat peculiar. She then proceeds to describe how she keeps the doll on a shelf in her bedroom. The fact that the doll is kept on the shelf, put away yet always in her bedroom, seems to convey its dual character: while it is not part of Amelia's everyday life, it has been a constant presence over time. Finally, Amelia describes her daughter as quite intrigued by the temporal dislocation of the materiality of the doll, 'the material isn't the same (...)', 'the clothes [are] kind of different too'. In her daughter's eyes the doll unmistakably belongs to the past. By the end of this segment Amelia - sweet as always in her manners and intonation - may be slightly uncomfortable, or just tired after sharing all the above, 'I don't know what else would you like me to tell you'. I ask her to free associate a bit more, proposing sitting in silence both hoping to stimulate further associations, and to allow her to have some rest towards the end of the first quarter of the session:

Coca: uhm... what else comes to mind... we-- <u>we can be in silence for a while</u>...
Amelia: mmm (pause) you say... <u>what comes to mind on the instant</u>? (**Coca**: yes...) <u>all right</u>!... this is my *'mono' [doll]*... <u>an important part of my life</u>, as I told you, <u>because my dad gave it to me uh, I remember him, I evoke him</u>... uh, I think of the moments, the beautiful memories we had, I think about my childhood, about playing, doing crazy things, laying him down on the floor (laughs) I don't know, *[playing with water and]* getting it wet at some point... uh... holding him in my arms...

After corroborating our method, ('what comes to mind on the instant?') Amelia enthusiastically resumes her reflection about her doll: 'all right!'. She describes the doll as 'an important part of her life', as it allows her to *evoke* her father, hand in hand with her childhood play memories around the doll. The doll's importance to Amelia was already implied in her discourse, however this was the first time she stated it explicitly. In what follows, she provides a present time interpretation of the relation she had with the doll in her childhood:

...and now that I am this old, I think it was at that moment uh… <u>It's a crazy thing what I'm going to say (breathes in) but... it was like being the *'mono' [doll]*'s mom (laughs out loud)</u> you know? And that, to be his mom... to have taken care of him... protected him... uh, to be there with him... mmm, and <u>that craziness uh... is, kind of, part of what one does in life now</u>, see? Protecting your children, feeding them... caressing them-- uh talking to them, and if we bring this to the work sphere, with children, <u>it is sort of the same</u> (…) your question made me reflect on that... that <u>it was the first experience of protecting someone</u>

Amelia describes having established a mothering relation to the doll in her childhood. She deems this engagement with the doll to be hilariously crazy yet at the same time, the basis for the mothering bonds she formed later in life with her children and students; all these modes of relation are, for Amelia, *sort of the same*. She summarises these relationships as *the experience of protecting someone*, an experience inaugurated in her relation to her doll and later extended to her identity as an educator, in what could suggest a certain idealisation of her role as carer.

Adding some layers

The naming of Amelia's doll after her father arguably strengthens the doll's role in signifying him through the superimposition of two signifiers: the materiality of the doll, and the *acoustic image* of the father's name. An acoustic quality is at the core of Saussure's definition of a signifier, '(…) the 'acoustic image' which signifies a signified' (Saussure, 1916 in Evans, 2008, p. 189). Lacan drew on Saussure's definition of the signifier to develop his. Amelia's account of having named the doll seems to have the effect of animating it, infusing it with life. This may be seen in the leap from her narration about the name, to her description of taking care of the doll in the present, as if it was a human child. She laughs profusely after uttering this, perhaps hinting at the uncanniness[90] of seeing her adult-self relating to the doll in an animistic manner.

Her description of having felt that she was *like the doll's mom* may reveal a retrospective identification of herself as embodying a maternal position. Similarly, her description of her relation to the doll as *the first experience of protecting someone* may entail the use of retrosignification as well. In this way she identifies with a position of carer, arguably also drawing on her present experience of mothering her children and students. This circulation of meanings may be seen, for instance, in her use of the

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[90] The quality of being strange or mysterious, especially in an unsettling way (EOD). Freud described the uncanny (*'unheimlich'*) as experiencing something simultaneously as familiar and unfamiliar, especially because of its appearance in an unfamiliar context. He suggested that *'unheimlich'* is specifically opposed to *'heimlich'*, that which is homely and familiar but can also mean secret, concealed or private. In this way, *'unheimlich'* may not just signify the unknown, but also, the bringing out of something hidden or repressed (https://www.tate.org.uk).

phrase '[having] protected him', at which point it is not completely clear whether she is referring to the doll, the father, her children, or perhaps all of them. Amelia astutely points out a further element about the doll, which she suggests adds a layer of significance:

> **Amelia**: the other thing I remember about this doll is that… as it was *[given to me]* on a special day… which was my birthday… (**Coca**: uhum) uh that left a deep mark on me too, because… it wasn't any day uh? (**Coca**: right) it was my birthday!

As seen, an onomastic association and the connection to Amelia's birthday as a crucial event constitute additional layers that further contribute to the *birth* of the doll as an overdetermined signifier.

1.3 Discussion on the birth of the signifier

In the previous subsections, I suggested that the process by which Amelia's doll progressively became an overdetermined signifier was *afterwardsness*, also referring to this as retrosignification or retrospective identification. Before addressing this concept, I will briefly address the notion of overdetermination, one of the most important properties of unconscious functioning.

Freud's understanding of the *dream-work* – the unconscious processing of dreams – offers a useful model to conceptualise the unconscious' functioning in a wider sense. He distinguishes between *dream-contents* and *dream-thoughts*. The first consist in the manifest contents of dreams, those one remembers after waking up, whose literal reading would lead to a misinterpretation. Dream-thoughts on the other hand, constitute the latent meaning of dreams, which find concealed expression in dream-contents, as if transposed to a different language. However, there is no one-to-one connection or relation between dream-contents and dream-thoughts; multiple dream-thoughts can be condensed in dream-contents (Freud 1900, p. 295). In this sense, manifest elements in dreams constitute nodal points at which many dream-thoughts meet (p. 299). In other words, each element of dream-content is overdetermined; that is, it has been represented in dream-thoughts multiple times (pp. 299-300). Concurrently, a dream-thought can find expression in several dream-contents, thus creating associations between the latter. Another important property of the relation between dream-contents and dream-thoughts is *dream-displacement*, by which the psychical intensities, the affects, directed to certain dream-contents constitute a distortion of the originary dream-thoughts (p. 324).

Dream-contents and dream-thoughts can be likened, respectively, to signifiers and their multiple possible meanings, exhibiting the same formation processes. In this way, Amelia's doll - in its materiality - acts as an overdetermined signifier simultaneously representing her father - the giving father and the dead father; her childhood; playing; a mothering disposition towards the doll, the father, her children, her students, etc. The name given to the doll - as an acoustic signifier - adds an additional signifying layer, strengthening the doll's meaning as a representation of the father.

In what follows, to understand how Amelia's signifier was constituted across time, I address the notion of afterwardsness, as it emerged in Freud and was critiqued and expanded by Laplanche (1999). Freud explained afterwardsness to his students, and its role in the gestation of neuroses using the following example:

> A young man who was a great admirer of feminine beauty was talking once –so the story went– of the good-looking wet-nurse who had suckled him when he was a baby: "I'm so sorry", he remarked, "that I didn't make a better use of my opportunity" (1900, p. 234)

Using this example, Freud wanted to illustrate how the sexual content of the situation only emerged from the perspective of adult sexuality. In terms of the temporality that connects both moments of the anecdote, Laplanche describes how a retroactive interpretation or *retrospective fantasising* - that is, a reversal of time - would simply involve the young man putting himself back in the past situation without wanting to know about infantile sexuality (p. 235). On the contrary, Freud's interpretation - that of the *double time* of excitation - does not reverse time in fact, it is deterministic. Although there is already a pleasurable somatic excitation in the baby's suckling of the breast, a greater excitation in relation to this representation can only arise after an organic maturation has occurred (p. 236). According to Laplanche, what is missing in these two possible interpretations of the afterwardsness of this scene is a third term, constituted by the nurse and her sexuality. That is, the fact that something is passed from the adult to the child; a *message* from the nurse to the infant (pp. 264). For Laplanche, Freud's neglect of this aspect relates to his abandonment of his seduction theory;[91] an abandonment which seems to altogether dismiss the role the *other* in the subjectivation process. In this way, attending to the above, Laplanche deems the idea that everyone interprets their past according to their present to be insufficient; the past already contains a message from the other waiting to be deciphered – threads of the other can be found in the past (pp. 257-258). As seen, Laplanche conceives

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[91] The notion that repressed memories of sexual content refer to infantile events that really took place.

afterwardsness not as an orderly transit between two points - either retrospective or deterministic - but as a constant movement. He names this a process of translation, de-translation and retranslation (p. 265). In this way, the concept of afterwardsness, being more than a simple regressive movement, may offer a textured, less normative framework in which to consider the process of retrosignification. The notion of regression would tend to suggest a linear, developmental temporality and fail to capture the complexity of the iterative process described by Laplanche.

In relation to the construction of Amelia's doll as a signifier, it can be suggested that many of its meanings emerged in an iterative movement of afterwardsness. For instance, her appreciation of her father's gesture of getting her a doll in times of financial struggle may have been articulated in the present moment, from her adult perspective; beyond the potentially more immediate joy elicited by the mere fact of having received the doll, back in her childhood, or even concealing a (guilty) disappointment for not having received the exact doll she desired. A meaning that seems to have largely emerged from afterwardsness is the mothering Amelia describes as a result and characteristic of her relation to the doll. In unconscious terms, the *real life* death of Amelia's father may have also translated, at least partially, into the father's death as an internal object[92]. An object loss of this type has been described - among many other possibilities - as eliciting the development of mothering towards the dead object as a means of keeping the object alive (Freud, 1921). In this way, it is possible for Amelia's account of having developed a strong mothering relation to the doll that represents her father in multiple ways, to have been retrosignified after her father's death. Finally, echoing Laplanche's foregrounding of the role of the other, I suggest that Amelia's father has had a significant role in the constitution of the doll as a rich overdetermined signifier. Not only did he offer the doll to his daughter, a doll Amelia would play *house* with, hand in hand with a fantasised dad, which was ultimately him; his encouragement to give *it/him* a name also played a crucial role in the doll's consolidation as a signifier that, among many other meanings, importantly represented him.

2. The creation of a tertiary space

In this section, I explore two exchanges that took place around the middle of the session in which Amelia described her artefact as enabling a particular mode of

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[92] A mental and emotional image of an external object that has been taken inside the self (Klein, 1935). A fuller review of the notion of internal object can be found in Chapter 5.

communication within significant relationships in her personal and professional life. In the first extract ('Amelia's husband'), Amelia describes having a conversation about childhood with her husband, stimulated by the presence of the doll while in the second extract ('Amelia at the kindergarten: You were also four once?'), she describes having a similar conversation, this time with her students.

Amelia's mode of communication is characterised by an idiosyncratic experience of time and engagement with the external reality, which seems to mobilise in her different identitary attachments across time. The main point I develop in this section is the consideration of Amelia's artefact in the light of transitional phenomena, pointing out convergences and departures from this model.

2.1 Amelia's husband

The following is a two minute extract, starting on minute 26 of the session. It describes what happened with the doll when Amelia left her parent's house after getting married:

Full extract

> (...) it was a part of me that had to leave with me, I couldn't leave him at my parents' house... he had to come with me to the new life I was about to start with somebody else (**Coca**: mmm) So that was... meaningful too... to get the *'monito' [dolly]* and take it with me... you know? Then Iván, my husband asked me '*what's with that doll you always keep there?*', '*well... it's from my... my childhood, and I want to have him here, he'll always be here*'. Because he never took anything from his home uh? (**Coca**: mmm), he even said to me '*I never kept a toy from my childhood...*' so I told him '*well, what a pity for you*' (uses a childish tone voice and laughs out loud) and we talked about the *'mono' [doll]*, about toys... uh, that was helpful too. This *'mono' [doll]...* Mickey, also helped me to establish a, uh a bond with... with how the other lives their childhood (**Coca**: uhum), is what happened with me and my husband... he told me the things he did in his childhood uh, with certain toys, certain friends, the games they played, '*you know we played this and that... uh, but I never kept a, a 'monito' [dolly] from my childhood*', so this is what I wanted to tell you, this *'monito' [dolly]* has helped me to... to have a bond with, with my husband uh? To talk about a topic-- well we have a lot shared interests, that's why we have been together for so long (laughs), but it gave us something to talk about... uh oh thank you for the exercise because yes, now I'm remembering that we talked about the toys, the old times, the games... so... uh, the doll, Mickey, allowed me to have a connection to him, to keep a topic between the two of us... and to get to know the other... (**Coca**: mmm) now I'm remembering that, truly, now I'm remembering, as you said to allow things to come up

A first glimpse

As mentioned above, 15 minutes before this remark Amelia explicitly described the doll as *an important part of her life*. In what follows she seems to continue to elaborate on this idea, arguably taking it a step further; the doll is not only a part of her life, but *a part of her*:

(…) it was <u>a part of me that had to leave with me</u>, I <u>couldn't leave him</u> at my parents' house... he had to come with me to the <u>new life</u> I was about to start <u>with somebody else</u> (**Coca**: mmm) So <u>that was... meaningful</u> too... <u>to get the *'monito' [dolly]* and take it with me</u>... you know? Then my husband asked me '*<u>what's with that doll</u> you always keep there?*', '*well... <u>it's from my... my childhood</u>, and I want to have him here, <u>he'll always be here</u>*'. Because he never took anything from his home uh? (**Coca**: mmm), he even said to me '*<u>I never kept a toy from my childhood</u>...*' so I told him '*<u>well, what a pity for you</u>*' (uses a childish tone voice and laughs out loud) and we talked about the *'mono' [doll]*, about toys... uh, that was helpful too.

Amelia's departure from her parents' home seemed to infuse the doll with a certain agency. The doll must not be *passively* left behind, instead - being a part of Amelia - the doll had to *come* with her, to her new life. This could be seen as a moment of merging of both (Amelia's and her doll's) agencies, in which is not completely clear who the subject is. Amelia then describes the beginning of her marriage as starting a *new life with somebody else.* Yet, someone other than who? Who this originary other is, in relation to whom Amelia's husband is *somebody else*, remains uncertain. It might be useful to consider this dynamic from the perspective of Amelia's husband. He seems to be left outside of the Amelia-Mickey dyad; the doll, understood as representing an internal object, potentially signifying either Amelia's father or herself. Amelia then takes some reflexive distance to consider her account of events, 'that was meaningful... to [take] the dolly'. The attempted distance may also be affective as she turns Mickey into a minimised, generic *dolly*. Amelia's husband is intrigued by the doll's presence in response to which she informs him it belongs to her childhood, and will 'always be here'. The doll makes Amelia's husband realise he did not keep a toy from his childhood, to which she jokingly replies in a light-hearted voice tone, 'what a pity for you'. This interaction arguably resembles one between two children: a jealous, excluded boy, and a boastful, competitive girl. Nevertheless, Amelia describes the doll as enabling the creation of a bond between her and her husband:

This *'mono' [doll]*... Mickey, also <u>helped me to establish a, uh a bond</u> with... <u>with how the other lives their childhood</u> (**Coca**: uhum), is what happened with me and my husband... he told me the things he did in his childhood uh, with certain toys, certain friends, the games they played, '*you know we played this and that... uh, but I never kept a, a 'monito' [dolly] from my childhood*', so <u>this is what I wanted to tell you</u>, this *'monito' [dolly]* <u>has helped me to... to have a bond with, with my husband</u> uh? To talk about a topic-- well we have a lot shared interests, that's why we have been together for so long (laughs), but it gave us something to talk about... uh oh <u>thank you for the exercise</u> because yes, now I'm remembering that we talked about the toys, the old times, the games... so... uh, the doll, Mickey, allowed me to have a connection to him, <u>to keep a topic between the two of us</u>... and <u>to get to know the other</u>... (**Coca**: mmm) now I'm remembering that, truly, now I'm remembering, as you said to allow things to come up

For Amelia, the communicative potential she sees in her doll seems to go beyond the role it has had for her and her husband, in helping them 'to get to know the other'. Mickey has helped her to establish a bond with 'how the other lives their childhood'; a potentially anonymous, multiple other. By the end of this extract, Amelia gives indications of being aware of the reflective process she is undertaking, 'thank you for the exercise'. At the same time, and maybe more importantly, she reveals her desire to turn her speech into an address to me, 'this is what I wanted to tell you'. This is an aim that may not always be possible to meet - given the unstructured quality of the discourse that emerged in this context - and which was presumably constructed retrospectively, as it is possible that she only had this idea during the session.

Adding some layers

It seems to me that this extract shows, not only how Amelia's doll, as a signifier, continued to progressively add further layers of meaning, but also how it started to acquire new properties as an internal object; this time seeming to offer Amelia a representation of herself. In this way, the doll seems to have assisted Amelia in her engagement with the identitary investment of becoming a wife, ensuring she brought her past self to this new subjective role.

At the same time, the doll seems to have invoked Amelia's and her husband's child-selves, giving them the opportunity to meet each other, foregrounding their unconscious needs and attachments. This encounter seems to have taken place in an atemporal space organised around the doll, to which the paradoxical character of the doll both as an internal and external object was crucial. In this light, in the closing part of this section I will tentatively conceptualise the doll as a transitional object around which a transitional space was created, in order to better understand its several psychic functions.

2.2 Amelia at the kindergarten: You were also four once?

The following is a five minute extract that started at minute 32 of the session. It describes Amelia's use of the doll with her students, when bringing it to the classroom:

Full extract

Amelia: (...) I have taken him to school (...) and it helped me to connect with the kids. Because the little ones... they have a hard time believing this is yours! um... I told them '*it's mine, I've had him for a long time kids, uhm... I played with him*' and the kids asked me '*You were also four once?!*', 'yes, *I was also four, the same age as you and... well, they gave it [the doll] to me much later... when I was a bit older, but I want to share him with you*' and... go figure, the kids took care of him... they washed him well... then they gave it back to me (...) and drawing on that, we had an activity, where they also had to bring a toy (**Coca**: mmm) that belonged to them... you're not gonna believe me, they brought... only modern toys!... and told me about them... it was a beautiful activity (...) I realised the variety of toys they have, their weird names... the *Transformer*... the *Power what's-its-name*... I don't know much... so I've learned a lot too, see?... because, you cannot be alien to their reality, never, you must be up to date... and I realised the differences uh (laughs)... their toys are much more elaborate, more attractive... more... I don't know how to say it, more, more colourful, with more movement

Coca: more attractive?

Amelia: Yes, I mean, to them see? (**Coca**: mmm) for example, a little girl asked me, '*Your doll talks?*', '*No*', I said, '*it doesn't talk*', and then she brought a talking doll uh... a talking *Barbie*, then... another little girl brought a pink-haired *Barbie*... so she said '*but yours doesn't have hair*', '*no, he doesn't have hair... because he's baldy*', then we worked on vocabulary, what does bald mean... see? It was a rich activity because we compared... but I think all toys are attractive... after this experience I learned that, that mine was attractive too... but different... theirs are different too... and Coca, it allowed me to connect with them... and it shows you... you had a childhood too, that you also have a toy, that you want to share it with them as they shared, their toys with me too (...) so, Mickey helped me a lot in that class... it was a very rich experience, to get involved, to really get involved with the kids... to feel that, I repeat, that you're also a person, even though they know, but... that you also had a story, that's important, the story, telling them I was also little once, that I had toys, that I played just like them, and... that one had grown up, and when you grow up maybe you don't play as much anymore...

A first glimpse

As we have already seen, for Amelia her doll offers her opportunities to connect with others, to learn about the way they lived their childhoods. In what follows, she puts this to work with her students:

> **Amelia**: (...) I have taken him to school (...) and <u>it helped me to connect with the kids</u>. Because the little ones... <u>they have a hard time believing this is yours!</u> um... I told them '*it's[93] mine, I've had him for a long time kids, uhm... I played with him*' and the kids asked me '<u>*You were also four once?!*</u>', '*yes, <u>I was also four, the same age as you</u> and... well, they gave it [the doll] to me much later... when I was a bit older, but <u>I want to share him with you</u>*' and... go figure, <u>the kids took care of him</u>... they washed him well... then they gave it back to me

Firstly, the doll seems to have a perplexing effect on children, challenging them to hold in their minds *an* Amelia beyond - or more accurately, before - her present existence in the current moment. Thus, *an* Amelia who owns a doll is something difficult to grasp, 'they have a hard time believing this is yours!' The children's question then, is only logical, 'you were also four once?!'; their amazement revealing the uncanniness of displacing the familiar. The familiarity of *present* Amelia, brought to the - otherwise familiar - experience of being of four-years old, creates an unfamiliar overlapping that, ultimately, makes the dislocation obvious. For Amelia, the doll may offer tangible proof of that past moment in which she was just as small and playful as her students. For her, this newly acquired horizontality seemed to allow her to *share* her doll giving it due importance, a solemnity mirrored by the children who *[took]* good *care of him* and returned him to her. Perhaps in an attempt to continue creating this horizontal space, Amelia designed the following activity, in which children had to bring a toy to show and share:

> **Amelia**: (...) and drawing on that, we had an activity, where they also had to bring a toy (**Coca**: mmm) that belonged to them... <u>you're not gonna believe me, they brought</u>... <u>only modern toys</u>!... and told me about them... it was a beautiful activity (...) I realised the variety of toys they have, their weird names... the *Transformer*... the *Power what's-its-name*... I don't know much... so I've learned a lot too, see?... because, <u>you cannot be alien to their reality</u>, never, you must be up to date... and <u>I realised the differences</u> uh (laughs)... <u>their toys are much more elaborate, more attractive</u>... more... I don't know how to say it, more, <u>more colourful, with more movement</u>

Similar to the children's astonishment when they learned that Amelia owned a doll and was once four years-old, Amelia was quite amazed to see that the children brought, 'you're not gonna believe me... only modern toys!' Here Amelia seems to be somewhat disconnected from chronological time; it should not be a surprise that *modern* children bring *modern* toys. A certain disappointment may be at play as well, when seeing that none of the children's toys resembled hers. However, Amelia challenges herself to overcome her sense of alienation from the children's toys, from *their reality*, setting

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[93] There are eight instances in this extract, in which I had to decide whether to translate this word/suffix to *it* or *him*.

herself the task of grasping the character of their difference. She comes to the conclusion that today's toys are 'much more elaborate', 'more colourful', 'with more movement', and ultimately are 'more attractive'. When stating something is more elaborate, colourful or has more movement, a certain agreement can be reached; whereas attractiveness constitutes a largely subjective appraisal, hence I marked the following:

> **Coca**: more attractive?
> **Amelia**: <u>Yes, I mean, to them see</u>? (**Coca**: mmm) for example, a little girl asked me, '*Your doll talks?*', '*No*', I said, '<u>*it doesn't talk*</u>', and then she brought a talking doll uh... a talking *Barbie*, then... another little girl brought a pink-haired *Barbie*... so she said '*but yours doesn't have hair*', '*no, <u>he doesn't have hair... because he's baldy</u>'*, then we worked on vocabulary, what does bald mean... see? It was a rich activity because we compared...

By specifying that it is *today's* children to whom *today's* toys are more attractive, Amelia seemingly seeks to confirm her love for her own doll. However, today's children's desire for other toys seems to cast a shadow over her contrastingly démodé toy, giving back a devitalized reflection of a mute, hairless doll. Amelia then further continues to attempt at reconciling with the otherness of her doll:

> **Amelia**: ...but <u>I think all toys are attractive</u>... <u>after this experience I learned that, that mine was attractive too</u>... <u>but different</u>... theirs are different too... and Coca, it allowed me to connect with them... and <u>it shows you</u>... <u>you had a childhood too</u>, that you also have a toy, that you want to share it with them as they shared, their toys with me too (...) so, <u>Mickey helped me a lot in that class</u>... it was a very rich experience, to get involved, to really get involved with the kids... <u>to feel that, I repeat, that you're also a person</u>, even though they know, but... <u>that you also had a story, that's important, the story, telling them I was also little once</u>, that I had toys, <u>that I played just like them</u>, and... that one had grown up, and <u>when you grow up maybe you don't play as much anymore</u>...

Amelia seems to conclude that the attractiveness of her doll lies in its crucial role of confirming that she 'had a childhood too'. In *doing* this, Mickey was utterly helpful; not only did he confirm Amelia had a childhood, but that she was 'also a person', who 'had a story'. The need to confirm in her classroom, in front of her students that she is a person, 'even though they know it', may signal the profound importance of the doll (whether material or internalised) to Amelia, as a structuring signifier to which she anchors herself to navigate the timeless space of the classroom. At the same time, 'having a story', the act of narrating herself, may represent to Amelia the possibility of inhabiting a paradoxical space in which one is both *little* and *grown up* at the same time, in which one 'used to play', but 'maybe does not play as much anymore'.

Adding some layers

This extract shows how Amelia's bringing of her doll to the classroom seems to open a space rich with possibilities, not only in terms of her relation to the children, but also and arguably more importantly, in terms of how she narrates herself; her relation to her doll seems to structure this narration.

As outlined above, I consider the doll to have articulated a horizontal communication space between Amelia and her students in which she was allowed to bring her child-self, with all the temporal and subjective paradoxes this may entail. The children seemed to return to Amelia a devitalised reflection of her doll, revealing to her some losses she already knew about; the fact she is a grown up now and no longer plays as much as she used to play. At the same time, Amelia seems to find in her doll an identitary anchoring that allows her to navigate the relations with her students. The notion of transitional space may be useful to explore these relations in the classroom, arguably mediated by Amelia's doll.

2.3. Discussion on the creation of a tertiary space

Donald Winnicott (1953) proposed the notion of *transitional space* as an intermediate space of intersubjective experience crucial to the development of the psyche, in which the child experiences the *transitional object*: their first *not-me* possession, which is able to represent for them, at the same time, a subjective internal object and an external one. Transitional space progressively enables the child's relation with reality by, paradoxically, constituting a space - in the realm of illusion - in which the child will never be expected to know how fantasised or real their experience is.

Winnicott (1953) further states that the transitional object, often embodied in a soft toy, is not a part of the baby's body - that is, has a *not-me* quality - yet the baby does not fully recognise it as a part of external reality (p. 89). A crucial point for Winnicott, is that the transitional object constitutes a possession, and is *not* an internal object. The transitional object's existence though, depends on the existence of good internal objects. Among its other attributes, it is important that transitional objects' continuity is never broken; this is why mothers and children are happy to let them get dirty, even smelly. Transitional objects need to show vitality or have a reality of their own, while later, as children grow up, they will be gradually decathected[94] – not forgotten nor mourned, but progressively losing their meaning. When this happens, transitional

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[94] When cathexes (a certain amount of psychical energy) are withdrawn from previously cathected ideas, objects, parts of the body, agencies (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973 pp. 72, 484).

objects will become diffuse; spreading out over the transitional, intermediate territory between inner and outer reality, as experienced by two persons. It is in this sense that the transitional space has a tertiary character, because of its emergence from a dyadic relationship (p. 91). As a stage of development, transitional phenomena constitute the root of the capacity to use symbols (p. 92). In other words, transitional phenomena represent a journey from sensory immediacy to symbolic awareness; a process Winnicott suggests culminates in the development of the baby's ability to play (Abram, 1996, p. 343). Arguably, this is why the encounter of two subjectivities in a transitional space is also often described as the overlapping of two zones of play.

The legacy of infantile transitional phenomena in adult life can be described as the inauguration of a third zone in the life of a human being, an intermediate area of experience to which both inner life and external reality contribute. This contribution consists in the offering of a resting place for the lifelong task of keeping inner and outer reality both separated and in interrelation. This is a task that involves, among other things, the acceptance of reality; an acceptance that is never fully achieved. The impossibility of completely accepting reality is consistent with the fact that the third area of experience is a continuation of the subjects' play zones; thus remaining in the realm of illusion. Finally, this illusory character of the third area will give rise to the cultural field enabling the emergence, for example, of art, religion, and other cultural manifestations (Winnicott 1953, p. 91).

From my perspective, Amelia's doll exhibits many attributes that resonate with the notion of a transitional object. Firstly, it has a material presence, clearly constituting a *not-me* possession. It is also imbued with vitality, as seen in the many occasions when Amelia relates to *him* in an animated, life-infusing manner. Simultaneously, Amelia's doll seems to connect her with her own playfulness offering her an illusory realm in which it is possible to avoid completely accepting reality; a place to rest from that elucidating task. Lastly, and more importantly, the doll seems to open an intersubjective field for Amelia in which she can meet the other (her husband, her students) in the overlap between their zones of play without having to decide whether her doll is real or not, whether she is a little girl or a grown up, or whether the encounter is taking place in the past or the present.

Conversely, several elements may indicate that Amelia's doll does not constitute a transitional object as defined by Winnicott. Importantly, the fact is that, for him, the transitional object cannot be an internal object. In contrast, it may be possible to interpret Amelia's doll as representing an internal object on at least two occasions.

Namely, when she demonstrated a mothering attitude towards the doll, which seemed to be directed at an internalised representation of her father, and when the doll seemed to represent aspects of Amelia's own self, displayed in her engagement with the classroom. These two examples seem to clarify a decisive difference between a transitional object and Amelia's doll; Amelia's use of her doll is already largely mediated by symbolic processes, even though the doll also elicited in some occasions, less mediated responses to ineffable contents. At the same time Amelia's doll, unlike a transitional object, does not seem to have lost its meaning as Amelia left childhood and entered adulthood. Accordingly, Amelia does not seem to have decathected her doll over time. In fact, the opposite might be true although it is possible that Amelia might have undergone a certain mourning process in relation to the doll. Notably, a mourning for the doll as a representation of the dead father.

3. Thirdness in a one-participant session

In this section, I explore the challenges and specific features that characterised this one-to-one session giving consideration to the ways in which this format affected my role in the session, demanding a mode of intervention very different than the one I adopted in group sessions.

3.1 Format and some intersubjective considerations

Several factors gave this session a very specific character. As previously described, I expected it to be a two-participant session, as two participants had excused themselves from the session in advance. However, moments before the session a third participant also got in touch to excuse herself as she had woken up with a fever. According to my field notes, I felt both disappointed and uncomfortable about the unexpected one-participant format the session would have. Interestingly, Amelia pointed out on her arrival that I looked happy, and that she was glad that I was happy about doing my fieldwork; *compensatory happiness* I wrote down in my diary. This seemed to show unconscious yet significant efforts on my part to counteract my upsetting feelings so as to avoid conveying them to Amelia. She said she did not to have a problem with the idea of it being just the two of us, on the contrary, she thought there could be a benefit in having a one-to-one session.

Throughout the 55 minutes of the session Amelia engaged committedly with the free associative task. Perhaps because of Amelia's chosen artefact, the biographical character of the session along with the one-to-one setting and her favourable disposition, seem to have stimulated in her an intense evocation of past memories.

Amelia's affective engagement with her associations peaked quite early during the session. Around minute five, Amelia was already able to verbalise deep feelings; for example, '(…) death is a loss uhm and it makes me very sad', seemingly allowing herself to experience these feelings, as seen in her getting tearful right after uttering this. Amelia's tearfulness was unexpected and uncomfortable for both of us, yet possible to endure. In what could have made for a very worrisome start of the session, I was confident we would be able to carry on and have a session that would be fruitful for both of us. The main sources for my confidence were my perception of Amelia's personality and disposition, and my clinical training, which allowed me to feel properly equipped to appraise and contain any possible distress.

Unlike any other session, this session contained more and longer silences; there were at least nine long pauses of between 15 and 35 seconds. These silences were uncomfortable yet tolerable for us both. They seemed to bring up, either crystallised accounts of previous associations, or even richer memories. However, the last and longest silence - around minute 40 - did not seem to produce any further associations, consisting instead in an apparently uncomfortable return to content that had emerged earlier in the session. I interpreted this as a sign that Amelia was starting to feel tired after her intense emotional work during the session; thus, it was a prompt to start bringing the session to an end. I thought I should increase the structuredness[95] of the session by offering clear guidance so we could close the session as smoothly as possible. I attempted to do this by using reflection, that is, paraphrasing Amelia's words back to her, in order to reflect some of her meanings and feelings that had emerged. As the character of the overall session up to this point, has been described sufficiently above, in what follows I will focus on the closing minutes of the session, consisting in my reflective intervention and Amelia's response to it.

3.2 Ending the session

My lengthy, nearly two minutes long intervention starting on minute 44 was the following:

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[95] Quality or condition of being structured (EOD).

Coca: so... we've talked a lot about... what <u>this baldy</u>[96] evokes, um at the beginning... uh... the idea that it's <u>a memento of your dad</u> (**Amelia**: yes) um... <u>it also represents, playing</u> um, <u>childhood</u>

Amelia: childhood (<u>almost inaudible</u>)

Coca: uhm... <u>a way to bond with others</u>, to <u>open a conversation</u>... <u>about</u> ... <u>who one was before</u>, uhm... a tool to <u>open a dialogue with the children</u> (**Amelia**: yes, that too) uhm... some-- something that is <u>present throughout the different stages</u>... so, in that sense... it symbolises ... <u>change</u>, uhm... you also mentioned a <u>loss</u> of... of <u>things that were one way and now are not</u> (**Amelia**: mmm) of <u>that which was yet isn't anymore</u>

Amelia: yet isn't anymore (<u>in unison</u>)

Coca: um... also <u>difference</u>... things that are different now... um, and you also mentioned a <u>joy</u>

Amelia: yes, absolutely

Coca: um, then let's take a few minutes to ... to think about all these words, those meanings that... emerged and... <u>see if we can think</u> of something else, in relation to that

I start my utterance referring to this *baldy*, engaging for the last time in a certain shared animism, by which the doll was not a generic toy, but *baldy Mickey* (as Amelia had called it earlier). The first comment I reflected to Amelia remained quite close to her own description; the doll was 'a memento of her dad' and it represented playing and childhood. Interestingly, Amelia's response to my first remark was to repeat childhood, the last word I said, in what I interpreted as an attunement[97], as if she was the one who was reflecting back to me. As I had not taken notes during the session, I just presented the contents to Amelia as they appeared in my mind[98]. My next rephrasing remained descriptive and close to Amelia words; 'a way to bond to others', 'to open a conversation, a dialogue', 'about who one was before', 'something present throughout different stages'. Immediately afterwards, I suggested that the doll symbolised change. This was a jump that I deem to be largely projective, coming from my own processing of Amelia's contents. Phenomenologically[99], it is fair to describe Amelia's narrative as depicting change; for example, the change that loss entails. However, Amelia's subjective, unconscious experience of loss seemed to be imbued with the stagnation of wanting to remain in the past that existed before the loss, instead of embracing its

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[96] In Spanish, baldy (diminutive noun) is not necessarily a derogatory term; it can be used as a term of endearment.

[97] State of receptiveness or awareness (EOD).

[98] It is worth noting I did not take notes during full group sessions either. I attempted to do so on one or two occasions in other sessions, when I really wanted to retain specific, important words. When I did this, the groups visibly felt observed so I immediately refrained from doing it. Ultimately, not taking notes may have made possible a state of evenly-suspended attention (Freud, 1912), desirable when attempting to undertake free-associative work.

[99] With a focus on consciousness and direct experience.

inherent change. My last paraphrases seem to have become somewhat more abstract, thus resulting in them being more ambiguous and elusive; the doll represented 'things that were one way and now are not', 'that which was yet isn't anymore'. Amelia's attunement seemed to increase, as seen in how she completed my last phrase, uttering it with me in unison. Finally, I added *difference* and *joy* to my account to counterbalance elements, in paradoxical coexistence with the previous ideas of stagnation and loss. I finished my intervention by asking Amelia to see if *we* can think of something else, by this point accepting and acknowledging that I had actively engaged in the production of a shared fantasised discourse.

An intervention of this nature would normally have the purpose of having its recipient to ponder their own contents. In this case I intended it a gesture of containment and, ultimately, of acknowledgment of her profound associations. Given that I introduced this intervention at the end of the session, it also took the role of summarising her contents which I had not intended yet which felt appropriate. I would have never used this way of intervening in any other moment of my group fieldwork activities. It seemed to compromise the possibility of my going unnoticed, something that I felt I had been allowed in the other sessions and considered important in helping the groups to free-associate. In this case, I felt it was necessary, more sensible - and even potentially productive - to intervene in this way. I consider Amelia's affect-laden eight-minute response at minute 46 to be an indication of this; it was here that she produced some astute closing insights. The following are three short quotes from three different parts of this utterance; they are not completely thematically connected and so lack some context. I present them though, aiming at showing their profoundness, and the leap they represent in terms of taking the ideas she elaborated on throughout the session a final step further. The first quotation describes how, for Amelia, the doll symbolises multiple manifestations of the love she has experienced throughout her life:

> (...) he, is part of the love I had with my father and... that love has pierced my life, it has always been present... with my own children, my husband, and... with the children *[at work]*, uh? The fact that I've been able to carry that story of *my life*, of what happened to me, bring it to other contexts, to other people, having been able to share it...

Amelia expressed the intensity of how her father's 'love has pierced her life', and how the doll has assisted her in carrying this love, expressed in the 'story of her life', and in sharing it with other people and in other contexts. She then described how the doll had allowed her to establish a close relation with children at her work:

(...) with the children... it is a <u>great emotion</u> because... it's like <u>giving them something from me</u>... the emotion of... saying *'kids look, <u>this happened to me too</u>... <u>I laughed too</u>, I was happy when they gave it to me '*, um... of <u>crying too</u>, at some point, because <u>the person who gave it to me is no longer in this life</u>...

Amelia described how sharing her doll with the children made her feel the great emotion of giving them a part of her, while giving her the opportunity to identify with the children at an emotional level, 'this happened to me too', 'I laughed too', '...cried too'. Her mourning of her father seems to inhabit the cry she shares: 'the person who gave it to me is no longer in this life'. She then suggests an originary, historicising role for the doll:

(...) I feel that the doll... <u>maybe was the beginning of</u>... <u>of wanting to be a mother</u>, of making your own family, of... <u>look what I am going to say</u>, <u>a starting point for choosing a profession</u>! It's like, I don't know, <u>a sign</u>... <u>that something happened to you</u>, <u>something triggered, in your life, those things to happen to you</u>... and <u>I am grateful</u>, because this happened to me

Acknowledging the power of her claims, 'look what I am going to say', Amelia suggested that the doll may have constituted the beginning of *wanting to be a mother*, and *choosing a profession*. She then seemed to incline towards a more enigmatic role for the doll, as 'a sign', of going through things that 'were triggered' by something, the doll itself. Amelia's remark about gratefulness made me feel the session had been meaningful to her in a positive manner. She made a final comment about the modality of the session and what she took from it:

Amelia: (...) you said *anything*, and that came to my mind... that's what I can tell you... <u>that was my reflection</u>, <u>in relation to the last question you asked me</u>, <u>when you guided me</u>... (whispers)
Coca: (clicks tongue) that's brilliant Amelia... anything else?
Amelia: (...) no, I would like just to thank you because... uh, <u>I had never had such a deep conversation, around, why I became an educator</u> (laughs) I'm telling you honestly, it reminded me a lot of my dad... and thanks for the opportunity of having reflected on this because, you keep many things to yourself and suddenly, they come out, and I also <u>thank you for being just the two of us</u>, because <u>maybe with other people I would not have been able to... elaborate this much</u>

Amelia acknowledged my guidance in this last part of the session and expressed thanks for the opportunity of having a 'deep conversation' about why she 'became an educator'. In spite of being present throughout the session, the theme of why Amelia became an educator did not strike me as the core of her narration, beyond her claim of the experience of protecting her doll as being the antecedent of the care relation she would later establish with her students. This may be an indication of Amelia potentially

internally, and in parallel, processing her discourse in which her relation to her profession had more prominence, beyond the reach of our spoken exchange. Finally, she thanked me for 'being just the two of us', acknowledging that this made a crucial difference in terms of the intense elaboration she was able to engage with, while seemingly forgetting how fortuitous this was.

3.3. Discussion on thirdness in a one-participant session

As discussed in the previous chapter, the term *intersubjective third* (Ogden, 1994) has been used to characterise that which emerges from an intersubjective encounter, involving the contact or union of subjectivities (Gordon, 1991), and ultimately exceeding them. An earlier concern with the idea of thirdness can be found in Winnicott's (1959) notion of transitional space, which he firstly proposed to characterise a third area of living between the subjectivities of mother and infant. Similarly, a useful way to conceptualise what emerges from the intersubjective bond or encounter is notion of the *analytic field* (Baranger & Baranger [1961-1962] 2008; in Bernardi, 2017), understood as the unconscious fantasy that stems from the engagement of two people in a shared psychodynamic process.

In what follows, I give a brief account of how the intersubjectivity that emerges from groups has been described conceptually. As the sessions in my project typically had three or four participants, considering some characteristics of group functioning may offer a useful counterpoint against which to ponder what was different about the one-participant session.

As outlined in the Theoretical framework chapter, groups add another layer to the intersubjectivity that arises in them; not only do relationships take place between subjects, but a relationship between the subject and the group as a whole is also enabled. According to Arcari (2003), the unconscious group setting offers an emotional field that allows a specific type of mental life to emerge, one that is qualitatively different from the one enabled by a two-person setting. The experience in the group of being observed (by the group convener, conductor or analyst) intensifies the intersubjectivity that is created in it (Gordon, 1991). This is why potent unconscious dynamics such as regression and projective identification can come to life in groups, appearing and disappearing quickly (Arcari, 2003). Likewise, because of the decentring that can be experienced in groups, subjects may experience the feeling of being drawn from their individual identity (Gordon, 1991).

It has been argued that not much deliberate action is needed for a group to form. In most cases, the members' mere presence can already enable a deep engagement with the group. In terms of the communication that groups facilitate, participants' thoughts and words interweave creating a distinctive fabric which can give birth to a shared discourse (Gordon, 1991). In terms of the engagement with the group activities, the group format may elicit, in the participants, a culture of 'embeddedness'. A sense of belonging and a culture of 'inquiry' have been described to emerge, the latter consisting in having an interest in looking and listening to others and to oneself (Pines, 1996). Lastly, and somewhat conversely, as described in the previous chapter, authors like Szykierski (2010) and Civitarese and Ferro (2013), have argued that a group perspective can be used to consider dyads, specifically the analytic couple. While the first asserts the analyst/analysand pair can be seen as a part of a larger group situation (like psychoanalysis and society), the latter take the idea a step further, describing the analytic couple as a group in itself.

Some of these concepts may help to make sense of the interaction that took place between Amelia and I in our one-to-one session. It is fair to describe the session as an intersubjective encounter between two subjects from which a certain *thirdness* emerged. Conceptualising this *thirdness* as the emergence of an *analytical field* seems reasonable too, in the sense that Amelia and I created a shared unconscious dyadic fantasy, organised around an animistic, personifying engagement with her artefact. My analysis has suggested the ways in which our engagement during the session had a significant fantasised character, mostly thanks to some of the transitional qualities of Amelia's doll and the paradoxical possibilities it opened. Taking place outside a clinical context, we did not constitute an analytic couple. On the other hand, we gathered around a task that had a psychoanalytic nature - that of free association - thus resembling the mode of functioning of analytic groups, brought together around an analytic task.

In any other of the group sessions it was clear that I was not a group participant. I was, in all cases, the convener of the group sessions and never a group analyst, as the working session did not aim to constitute a therapeutic group. At the same time, as previously outlined, my approach to the sessions shared with analytic groups a direct interest in how groups work. However, in the one-to-one session, my certainty about not being a group member vanished as I felt under the spotlight of having to walk hand in hand with Amelia as she produced her discourse, being ready to sustain it if needed. I previously mentioned how my engagement with the session made me feel that I had

lost the invisible position of the group convener, from which I was able to comfortably watch the group processes unravel. However, considering Gordon's (1991) observation of the group's intense awareness of being observed, the opposite may be true, the role of the group convener may be anything but invisible to the group. This idea may be supported by Amelia's response to my participation in the one-to-one session. My engagement with the session as a non-convener/*kindred* participant may have made my presence less noticeable to her, as seen in her profuse production of free-associations and the profoundly personal and introspective character of her evocations. Overall, a dyadic functioning can be suggested, yet with certain asymmetries. In spite of not acting as an analyst, I received Amelia's contents using an analytic mode of listening. Similarly, I did not bring any personal content to the creation to the shared unconscious fantasy, thus Amelia's contents and associations were the crucial fabric of our alliance.

4. Conclusions

4.1 Summary

This chapter has explored the potential of the specific psychoanalytic tools of overdetermination and afterwardsness, and the wider psychoanalytic conceptual frameworks of intersubjective thirdness and transitional space to analyse what took place in a free-associative session attended by only one participant, Amelia.

During the session which was devoted to associating to child-related artefacts, Amelia's artefact (a doll) seemed to emerge as an overdetermined signifier that represented to her, among other multiple meanings, her father and her childhood. This signifier had seemingly been re-signified throughout Amelia's life, as seen in her shifting mothering relation to the artefact. At the same time, Amelia's artefact - without constituting a transitional object per se - may have enabled the emergence of a transitional space. The opening of this illusory realm offers the possibility of a playful engagement in intersubjective relations without a need to separate reality from unconscious life. It is likely that this enabled Amelia to develop a particular mode of communication and of establishing relations within her personal and professional life, arguably mobilising in her different identitary positionings across time.

The one-to-one format affected my role in the session, demanding a different mode of intervention from the one adopted in a group session. I directly intervened to sustain Amelia's discourse whose profound evocations may have been intensified as a product of having the session at her complete disposal. At different points, she demonstrated

awareness of the unusual format; this may have given her engagement with the session a certain deliberate character. The specific thirdness that emerged between Amelia and me in the session arguably exhibited features of dyadic functioning. While affect seemed to circulate in an intense and escalating manner in full group sessions, in this one-to-one format, intense affect seemed to emerge quite early and remain present throughout the session. This can be seen in Amelia's early and heartfelt associations around her father's death, and her continuing to engage in deeply introspective evocations throughout the rest of the session.

In spite of not seeming to have engaged in projective identification and its concomitant diffusion of subjective boundaries, Amelia still seemed to experience a certain decentring from her identity. While the hypothesised decentring does not seem to have caused Amelia to take direction from other subjectivities, it may have enabled her to circulate fluidly between diverse positionings within her own identity, partly stimulated by the dyadic functioning. As the dyad formed by Amelia and me in this session constituted a discrete event in the timeline of the group process that we both took part in throughout my project, an internalised, pre-existing group functioning may have infused a certain momentum to this one-participant session.

4.2 Concluding reflections

This chapter has analysed the free-associative discourse produced by an EC educator in response to a personal artefact, whose unconscious enabling of the production of subjective accounts has allowed me to show how multiple relational roles seemed to coalesce into complex professional subjectivities.

The act of care was considered by Amelia to be the most crucial aspect of EC practice, closely linked to the idea of protecting someone and crucially modelled after a mothering relation, and of which love seems to be a core attribute. Amelia's artefact allowed her to give an account of these and other lived and fantasised modes of relation, and the different identitary positionings mobilised by them. As summarised above, this functionality of the artefact may be characterised as an overdetermined signifier into which multiple meanings converged. From a methodological perspective, the literal materiality of the artefact (her doll) made it particularly applicable to this signifying function.

My analysis of Amelia's engagement with her artefact during the free-associative interview has allowed me to exemplify the complexity of unconscious temporality. Her artefact symbolised both past and present relations with the multiple others in her life;

father, siblings, daughter, husband, her students, and her overall experience of her childhood. As previously proposed, it can be argued that these relations coexisted in an ongoing dialogue enabled by a transitional space and were mediated by complex, iterative movements in time, stimulated by the translational effect of afterwardsness. Regarding how to integrate these multiple temporalities, Amelia described the act of narrating through her artefact, her myriad subjective roles, as a confirmation of being a subject; a narration that seemed to open for her the opportunity to inhabit paradoxical time. This may suggest a subjectifying function of narrating oneself and its crucial role in enabling a certain experience of subjective continuity, instrumental to navigating the primacy of the subject's breaks, gaps, and discontinuities. As before, using a psychoanalytic conceptual framework has allowed me to produce a detailed and versatile interpretation of unconscious dynamics. This can be exemplified by my use of the notion of a transitional object to make sense of Amelia's artefact, in spite of the fact that the doll did not meet the 'full criteria' to be considered one. My use of the concept, without aiming to pigeonhole the dynamics I was interpreting, in fact allowed me to do the opposite; to open up and explore those instances in which the artefact, despite its materiality, may have acted as an internal object.

The emergent free-associative discourse's evocative and introspective quality was arguably stimulated by the session's format; Amelia was faced with prolonged silences and an ever-present listener. As discussed, these sustained silences were perhaps experienced by Amelia as uncomfortable or even burdensome moments in which the decentring from her usual discursive position may have become particularly evident to her. Her need to reconfirm the free-associative rule after a long silence so she could resume her speech may be an indication of this highlighted decentring. This modality elicited deep elaborations, deep in terms of unconscious expression beyond normative notions of regression or inwardness; the unconscious subject is ultimately thrown and spilt everywhere. While her narration largely addressed biographical moments which were not always obviously related to the formation of her professional identity, Amelia characterised her whole discourse as an exploration of the question of why she became an educator. This makes manifest the data production method's suitability for the exploration of professional subjectivities, an exploration stimulated in this case by the presence of a child-related artefact. In this case, as before, the offer of a prompt to reflect on their notions of the child was largely interpreted by the educator as an invitation to explore her own childhood, making evident the inextricable mutual determination of both sets of representations. Considering all the above, the free-

associative interview presents itself as a deeply expressive method by which ineffable content - like the experience of death, as seen in Amelia's discourse - can be recognised and ultimately expressed through the emergence of its associated affects. Amelia's awareness of having engaged in a deeply evocative process and, ultimately, her view of the session as offering her a valuable way of articulating who she is, may be considered an indication of the transformative potential of the methodology.

In terms of my role in the one-participant free-associative interview, I was surprised by the way the methodology led me to an active engagement in a shared fantasy with Amelia, similar to the surprise experienced by her about the contents she shared during the session. My active engagement could be seen, for instance, in my unknowing encouraging of the personifying of the Amelia's artefact, which arguably stimulated a dyadic functioning with the underlying aim of preserving the overall group process. From this perspective, my increasing role of emotional containment towards the end of the session may have not only sustained Amelia's experience of overwhelming affect, but also the possibility for the dyad to continue to exist as an unconscious intersubjective alliance. My close analysis of the content and relational dynamics of a one-participant session has shown how free-associative interviews can be conducted prolifically in different formats. It ultimately demonstrates the versatility of researching with a group modality as group dynamics can affect and intensify the free-associative work beyond specific or 'literal' group instances.

THEMATIC DISCUSSION: Love in EC education (the maternal is the professional)

Introduction

In what follows, I consider the educators' accounts of professional love (for children) and their views on its role in the EC education context. While the topic emerged early in the first interviews, the educators kept returning to it throughout the sessions. As seen in the previous chapter, this topic was at the core of the discourse produced by Amelia when free-associating to a childhood artefact, which elicited in her a deep reflection on the personal care relations after which she modelled her pedagogical relationships, foregrounding their maternal aspects.

The participants in this study all agreed in the importance of love in the EC profession, seeming to actively work to identify themselves as distinctively loving and caring professionals, capable of affecting children's lives in deep and meaningful ways. With the aim of constructing this professional self-image, the educators seemed to embrace the maternal aspects of EC practice in a particularly open and affirming way. They also seemed to rely on an opposition to school education to define this positioning, drawing a contrast between the school level's obliviousness to the vital importance of love, and EC educators' affection-infused, ethical care practice. In order to develop this argument, in the first section of this discussion I describe participants' views on the role of affection in EC education and the goals they think must be achieved in this sphere. Their perspectives are consistent, as suggested in the literature, with understandings of care as essential to EC professionalism (Taggart, 2011) and with the notion of professional love (Page, 2017). Then, in the second section, I explore participants' uncompromising discourse on the role of motherly love in EC practice in the light of critical literature on maternalist discourses in EC education (Ailwood, 2007; Chang-Kredl, 2015; etc).

The transformative love of the EC educator

In this section I depict participants' views of the affection of the educator as the fundamental pillar of EC education. In agreement with the literature, they express the different ways in which they think love must shape their professional identity (Page, 2017), and their views of EC practice as constituting an emotional and pleasurable labour (Taggart, 2011; Warren, 2014).

Throughout the interview sessions, the educators agreed with the view that affection and care are deeply interrelated. While feeling affection for children would motivate engaging in a care relation with them in the first place, expressing this affection to them would constitute a care practice in itself. The educators' descriptions of the care practices they engaged in often involved significant elements of pastoral care:

> We as EC educators have to SAFEGUARD the affective[100] side of the child, so they can identify with you and OPEN UP, because a child will not come and tell you what's going on just like that, huh? So, I think that... in the whirlwind that is education, we have a very important role, *[to help]* children to be emotionally stable, because an emotionally stable child will thrive (...) even if they doesn't have a LOT of knowledge, doors are going to open to them in life (**Rafaela**, S2: the 'párvulo')

In their view, EC educators must boost children's emotional development by facilitating their emotional expression. Ultimately, children's acquisition of knowledge is less central than the achievement of emotional stability; cognitive skills are secondary to emotional skills. While the absence of affection can be severely detrimental, being affectionate with children can work miracles for them:

> There was this child, who was like, the disruptive child, he would ran away... didn't want to do a thing... and they put him in Irma's *[class]*, a colleague, she's very affectionate with children VERY very very affectionate (...) So she took care of him, helped him improve his personal hygiene, talked to his mother frequently, and this little boy, by the middle of the year... underwent an unbelievable transformation... unbelievable (...) so I say WOW yes... affection is fundamental (...) (**Blanca**, S3: educators' artefacts)

In this example, consistent pastoral care helped a child to overcome significant emotional difficulties. The following quote expresses the view that establishing an affective bond with children is indispensable to fostering in them emotional skills for life:

> Our challenge is *[to figure out]* how to start from affection, in order to achieve learning *[goals]* (...) *[to teach]* from affection, things that will be useful to *[them]* for life and *[have]* to do with responsibility, with their dispositions... (**Ida**, S3: educators' artefacts)

From the educators' perspective, the primacy of affection and its role in boosting children's emotional wellbeing was something that school level does not seem to understand or at least neglects. The following anecdote, involving the son of one of the

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[100] In Spanish, affective refers to both *affect*, emotion or desire as influencing behaviour; and *affection*, a gentle feeling of fondness or liking (EOD). *Afecto*, the Spanish term for affection, has a clearer connotation of love.

participants, was used to exemplify how primary teachers can fail to see children's need for affection, especially during their progression from EC to primary education:

> (…) my son had a bad experience when he left kindergarten and started primary school, he had a teacher who… she didn't express herself, she would stand like this (imitates a rigid body posture), and when she smiled to him… the first time, Julian approached her and hugged her legs… because that was the only thing he needed… (**Blanca**: affection) yes (**Eva**, S3: educators' artefacts)

Eva's son did not get the affection he needed from his primary teacher when he started school education. His need for affection became even clearer the first time his teacher made a friendly gesture towards him and he reciprocated effusively. In relation to this, while constituting a means to achieve multiple educational goals, giving affection to children should be an end in itself, especially given its decisive impact on the way children experience their classrooms:

> *[Children]* have to feel cared for, loved, they're away from home, far from their parents, especially in the first months, the first days, they feel they're going to leave them and abandon them… that's why they cry so much, and that's why for me emotions… and the affection of the EDUCATOR… are extremely important (**Eva**, S3: educators' artefacts)

Eva categorically asserted that the affection of the EC educator is particularly important demonstrating an agreement with understandings of EC education as an emotional labour (Hochschild, 1980, in Taggart, 2011). In particular, Eva's claim is consistent with the view that educators' role has a distinctively affective dimension, nearly unique to EC practice.

The EC professional envisaged by the educators was someone who must perform vital functions by offering themselves as an attachment figure for children and being someone they can identify with:

> *[We must]* take care of the children, respect them, hold them, acknowledge their presence… love is so important… if you don't get involved with the children, don't feel affection for them, you may not achieve any of your goals, what you expect them to learn cognitively. First… they *[need to]* get attached to you, and how do you that? With affection, asking them *'How are you?', 'How do they feel?'* touching their hair… and they respond to that (**Amelia**, S3: educators' artefacts)

This exacting depiction of the role of the educator resonates with descriptions in the literature of an ethics of care, and an understanding of care as a social principle and essential to EC professionalism (Taggart, 2011; Harwood et al., 2013). The notion of professional love, suggested to characterise educators' intellectual and emotional capacity to establish an attachment relationship with children (Page, 2017), seems

particularly relevant to this view of EC practice. The following quote picks up the idea that, while filial love is critical, expressing the educator's love for children is also key:

> The affection of the family is fundamental, but the affection of us educators as well, it makes a difference (...) the more attachment, the more affection a child feels for you, the more they learn (...) and that, sometimes, is misunderstood, misinterpreted, it happened to me that (...) the children I left last year, the nursery group, they *[are now]* in the middle level, they're still small, they're two years old, they see me and ran *[towards me]*, they hug me, we kiss, and (...) at some point someone said to me '*Hey you know what? You better stop it because... then children won't want to be in their classroom...*' and I felt sad... for a colleague to say that to you... I said '*God, she hasn't understood a thing...*' (**Blanca**, S3: educators' artefacts)

In this situation, others' disapproval of Blanca's loving interactions with children who are not in her classroom anymore is read by her as a complete lack of perspective on the centrality of affection to children. Her description of lovingly greeting her former students seems to echo descriptions in the literature of EC educators finding great emotional pleasure in their relationships with children (Warren, 2014).

As seen in this section, participants asserted that children need, acknowledge and reciprocate the love of the educator; a love that may pleasurably transcend the kindergarten. They seem to suggest this is a knowledge unique to the EC educator, ungraspable outside the profession.

A motherly kind of professional love

In this section, I use a participant's account of an instance of her practice to illustrate the educators' determined discourse on the indispensability of motherly love to EC practice; outlining how it both clashes and resonates with relevant literature on the role of the maternal in EC education.

In different moments in the sessions, the educators declared that they saw maternal love as the model for professional love in EC education. They did not seem concerned about being seen as unprofessional, demanding rather that this maternal disposition among their peers was an indispensable attribute:

> I had this experience, there was this middle level[101] classroom in which the children cried a lot... they were very scattered, it was very difficult for them to relax, so I said '*how strange, because the girl, the educator, she's very caring...*', they struggled a lot to adapt... and I said *'how strange'*, then I got closer to this co-worker and ... she had grown up without her mother... the girl had zero attachment, didn't have a maternal figure, so how could she... (**Ida**: it'll be impossible for her to...) how could you give this wonderful thing, which is your mother's love? (**Blanca**, S5: pedagogical biography)

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[101] Two and three year-olds.

While the high level of stress in this classroom did not make sense at first, learning about the educator's difficult relation with her mother gave Blanca and the group (who shared her interpretation) clues to the cause of this unsettledness. Lacking a direct experience of maternal love would make it impossible to provide an equally maternal love in the classroom; a love capable of soothing children's anxieties. This distinctive emphasis on the care aspect of their role, asserting motherly love as a benchmark of the love that educators should give to children, seems to set participants apart from prevalent engagements with the debate around professionalism in EC education; educators are frequently described as rejecting maternal conceptions of their role in order to assert themselves professionally.

As Chang-Kredl (2015) has observed and critiqued, educators have often been portrayed in canonical literature as oppressed or negatively affected by maternalist discourses in the field. In this context, the accounts of the educators in my project are consistent with research findings in which EC educators assert there is shared terrain between teaching and mothering, both embracing this continuousness and aiming to delineate boundaries between both spheres (Thomson and Kehily's, 2010). The above is in line with critical scholarship in EC education which has described EC educators' relation to maternalist discourses as complex, pointing out how not every educator rejects the possibility of a dual mother-teacher identity nor interprets it as undermining their professional status (e.g. Ailwood, 2007).

This brief discussion has allowed me to explore the often perceived chasm between professionalism and the maternal aspects of EC practice. Participants expressed their views about professional love as a pivotal attribute of EC educators who would be able to embody this love because of their unique understanding of its importance (an understanding lacking at the school level). This specific group of participants' open and unprejudiced affirmation of the maternal aspects of their practice, while at first surprising, may be partly explained by their professional confidence which allowed them to comfortably foreground the role of love in EC practice. This may be considered an indication of their engagement in the construction of a professionalism 'from within' (Osgood, 2010), without a significant concern for external attempts to regulate EC practice.

As seen in the previous thematic discussions, the participants worked actively to sustain their identities as knowledgeable, rigorous professionals. In relation to this, it can be argued that the identitary strengthening of the 'professional knowledge subject' may be instrumental to the possibility of inhabiting the 'professional love subject'

highlighting the complexity and multidimensionality of the professional subjectivities EC educators produce and perform. As exemplified and explored in Chapter 7, the primacy of professional love was at the core of Amelia's pedagogical interactions, which were largely subsidiary to establishing loving relations with children.

CHAPTER 8
Conclusion

Introduction

The focus of this study has been the production of Chilean EC educators' professional subjectivities in the socio-political context of the years preceding the writing of this thesis. In the introduction, I argued that professional subjectivities are shifting making it critical and fruitful to examine them, particularly given Chile's recent landscape of social mobilisation. This state of affairs has offered an opening both for EC educators to reclaim their agency in their own professional subjectivation processes, and for a prolific exploration of the underlying relations between educators and their practice; I hope I have conducted and articulated this exploration in the thesis. In what follows, I present the substantive and methodological findings and contributions of this research. I finish the chapter with some remarks and suggestions of future directions for research.

1. Substantive findings and distinctive contributions

My argument is that the professional subjectivities of EC educators are produced in the interplay of complex unconscious dynamics. This main proposition comprises the following arguments:

- The educators' engagement with EC practice is ethically challenging and emotionally demanding.
- This practice seems to interpellate EC educators into strong, coherent professional identities, so they can assert themselves and find directions in which to navigate this complex practice.
- EC educators seem to produce and perform these desired professional subjectivities relationally, at an intersubjective level.

In what follows I present the main findings around these three arguments:

An ethically challenging and emotionally demanding practice

As seen at different points throughout the thesis, the EC educators described their everyday role as entailing the exercise of professional judgement and complex decision-making about ethico-practical issues of their classroom practice and their relationships with children. They saw this aspect of their role as reflecting, for example, ethical position-takings in relation to wider discourses and critical debates in EC

education concerning views of vocation and the way in which children are perceived. My elaboration of this observation supplements Taggart (2011), Harwood et al (2013), and several other authors' understandings of care in EC education as the enactment of a social principle with a marked ethical dimension.

In Chapter 5, I discussed the educators' experience of their role in safeguarding children's nutrition which raised an ethical dilemma for them. In general, making sure that children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, seize the opportunity to eat properly at the kindergarten was seen as an important responsibility of the educator. However, making children eat all the food whatever their preferences could compromise the opportunity to behave as a principled, progressive educator, who claims to respect children's agency and uniqueness and acts accordingly. It was suggested that a non-negotiable stance regarding children's nutrition could be an indication of subjugation to a certain vigilance. An educator who acts this way would predominantly see feeding children as a personal goal, in compliance to external regulations of EC practice. Ultimately, this could denote lack of integrity and, possibly, hypocrisy.

As seen in Chapter 6, where I analysed an exchange between two participants, Ida and Delia, in depth, they perceived EC practice as emotionally burdensome and potentially overwhelming, in ways that may affect their vocation or have a negative effect on their relationship with children. Without giving an explicit account of the specifics ways in which their practice could become overwhelming, Delia and Ida conveyed a sense of excessive affect, signified by the numerous Others in their professional relationships: parents, guardians, the children, and colleagues. At an unconscious level, this experience of excessive affect seemed to stimulate a hypervigilance in them with regard to their own capacity to process the emotional intensity of EC practice to avoid acting out a fantasised destructive response to overwhelmedness. The negotiation of these dynamics seems to demand that the educators undertake onerous psychical work.

The impossibility of a coherent professional identity

Complex quandaries and dynamics, such as those exemplified above, seemed to interpellate educators into contested professional identities in the context of contradictory demands and discourses.

As discussed in Chapter 5, one of the predominant ways in which the educators seemingly unconsciously aimed to create these strong professional identities, was by

getting rid of undesired aspects of their self-image and any concomitant elicited affects. I offered an interpretation of these dynamics drawing on Lapping's (2011) transposition of the psychoanalytic concept of projective identification (Klein, 1935; Ogden, 2004) into social research. As developed in the thesis, following Lapping, projective identification is an omnipotent unconscious mechanism through which negative or unwanted aspects of the self are projected onto others, in an (unconscious) attempt to control their minds. This may, for example, aim at taking over the other's capacities to create an illusion of sameness.

In the abovementioned exchange around children's nutrition, the three educators who participated - Blanca, Eva and Ida - seemed to enact different modes of projective identification. Blanca assumed the role of embodying a hegemonic discourse on children's agency and professional integrity which was vigorously projected onto Eva and Ida with a controlling effect. Each of these two educators seemed to introject this persuasive discourse differently; ambivalently in the case of Ida, and in a persecutory manner in the case of Eva. This last educator came to represent an uncompromising discourse on children's nutrition; an attribution that was partly justified, from the group's perspective, by the fact that she practised at a school. In relation to this, schools were a type of EC setting strongly criticised by the group who associated school-based practice with rigid understandings of children. On the other hand, Ida, who had arguably introjected the 'children's agency' discourse ambivalently seemed to fail to register the conflict between this discourse and the 'nutrition' discourse. Her ambivalent engagement with both discourses allowed her to circulate fluidly among and identify with them at different moments. This may have had the primary gain of avoiding the difficult task of integrating these contradictory identitary elements thereby eluding the potential pain of failing to create a satisfactory professional identity. My interpretation of these complex unconscious dynamics from a projective identification perspective enriches the understanding of how the concept can be put to use productively in psychosocial research.

As I have shown, responding to the challenging, often paradoxical demand to become a coherent professional subject may not be completely possible. This may be partly because EC educator subjectivities often bring together the multiple roles which are at play in their many professional relationships across time, and these seem to mobilise different identity positionings that do not necessarily fit neatly onto each other.

In relation to this, in Chapter 7 I analysed one of the educators' (Amelia's) accounts (through an artefact) of her engagement with her professional practice. She identified

taking care of, protecting and loving children as the core attributes of an EC educator. These roles were, for her, crucially modelled on a mothering relation. My use of the psychoanalytic notion of overdetermination (Freud, 1900), the mechanism through which myriad unconscious contents can converge at a given representation, allowed me to explore the ways in which Amelia's understanding of the pedagogical relationship was also informed by past and present relations with multiple Others in her own nuclear and extended family, among other significant relationships. I offered the notion of transitional space (Winnicott, 1953), an intermediate space of intersubjective experience, to conceptualise the ways in which the abovementioned relationships seemed to coexist in an ongoing dialogue between fantasy and reality. Similarly, I proposed afterwardsness (Laplanche, 1999), the translational process of revisiting and re-signifying unconscious events and meanings, to make sense of the complex, iterative movements in time that mediated these relationships. While multiple identity positionings like these may seem to be integrated through the subjectifying function of narrating oneself, it is not truly possible to suture the breaks, gaps, and discontinuities between them.

A further aspect that offers resistance to the subjective project of developing a coherent professional identity, concerns the difficulty of integrating ambivalent feelings elicited by EC practice.

As described above, in Chapter 6 I explored Delia and Ida's perception of EC practice as potentially overwhelming; a state of things that could lead to negative consequences if not noticed promptly and handled properly by the educators themselves. Some signs of overwhelmedness may include experiencing disenchantment and a lack of motivation in the classroom, being tired of engaging in demanding interactions with children and, ultimately, a feeling of having worked in the classroom for maybe too long. From the educators' perspectives, if any of these emotions should emerge, Ida and Delia suggested that the EC educator must leave classroom practice almost immediately otherwise, there would be a high risk of negatively affecting children, colleagues, and their own mental health. However, in spite of how sad this loss of desire for the classroom can be, it could also offer an opportunity for renewing purpose and of pursuing other exciting paths in EC education such as research. Delia and Ida coincided in their shared image of the researcher as a creative, fulfilling mode of engagement with EC education outside the classroom. They exhibited a deep emotional investment in the construction of this idealised identity role. While these efforts to construct a strong, determined researcher identity seemed initially to succeed, as their discussion

continued to unfold, conflicting emotions and ideas began to emerge. Notably, the view that only classroom experience can inform sensible understandings of EC education and, ultimately, that the classroom is the only place where professional meaning can be found. The fact that Ida and Delia did not seem to register the contradictions between these perspectives, suggests that integrating certain identitary aspects of EC educators' subjectivities may never be completely possible.

As seen, my thesis has supported the literature's inclination to characterise EC practice as a distinctively emotional labour (see for example: Moyles, 2001; Manning-Morton, 2006; Chalke, 2013; Warren, 2014; Rabin, 2019; etc). While these and other authors have elaborated on several aspects of emotion in EC education, their perspectives do not take into account the role of unconscious affect in emotional experience. In response to this, my research takes a step further towards theorising the unconscious underside of emotion in EC practice.

The intersubjective production of EC educators identities

Throughout the thesis, I have presented and substantiated the claim that EC educators negotiate their professional subjectivities relationally, producing and performing them at an intersubjective level.

As outlined above and addressed in Chapter 6, Ida and Delia in their discussion about the loss of desire for the classroom made significant efforts to create an alternative, idealised researcher identity. Using the notion of intersubjective thirdness (Ogden, 1994), that is, that which emerges from and exceeds the contact of subjectivities, I theorised Delia and Ida's fostering of a joint desire for an extra-classroom practice as the emergence of a cohesive, unconscious dyadic alliance, under the illusion of sharing the same aims and desires. Specifically, I used Ogden's (2004) notion of the *subject of projective identification* to characterise the product of the temporary blurring of boundaries that seemed to take place between their subjectivities. The emergence of the subject of projective identification seemed to allow Ida and Delia to sustain the illusion of sameness and, most importantly, to 'secure' a 'satisfactory' EC researcher identity, through which contradictory or conflicting identitary positionings (like prioritising classroom practice or becoming a researcher) could be kept apart, at least transitorily. This thorough conceptualisation of the identity formation processes of EC educators further demonstrates the productivity of applying specialised psychoanalytic concepts to the study of professional subjectivities.

I further described the relationship that arose between Delia and Ida using the group theory concept of pairing (Bion, 1961; Sutherland, 1990; Szykierski, 2014; etc.); an unconscious mode of dyadic functioning that can emerge in a group context whose underlying fantasy is that confirmation of oneself can be found in a relation to the other. A predominant means through which Ida and Delia strengthened their relationship was the advancement of extreme discourses of EC education (which they performed in front of me), without a particular concern for the extent to which these discourses actually articulated with the professional identity they were aiming to create. Notably, they claimed to reject any exploration of definitions of children as exploring these representations would entail prescribing particular ways of being a child. Similarly, they declared their disapproval of research on children's play as engaging in this kind of research appeared to imply questioning the inalienability of children's right to play. Finding agreement in relation to these discourses seemed to fulfil, for both educators, a need to present themselves to the other as a principled, uncompromising professional. They did this despite not necessarily adhering to these strict perspectives or, more importantly, the fact that these very discourses arguably denied the researcher identity they longed to create. In this way, and instrumental in the development of a strong shared professional identity, the substance of a discussion on professionalism was subordinated to this relational function. My use of the notion of pairing to theorise these relations expands the limited knowledge on the complex unconscious dynamics that underlie teacher groups. In doing this, this study extends the utility of Groups theory beyond clinical contexts.

As I develop in further detail in the next section, participating in the group interviews of this research arguably enhanced the relational production of the educators' professional identities. Particularly, as the encounter with fellow EC professionals seemed to intensify the educators' feelings of being professionally interpellated by the others.

Throughout the thesis, I traced some of the identitary effects that engaging in the group discussions seemed to have on the educators' professional self-images. Notably, in Chapter 5 I gave an account of the destabilisation of the way in which Eva - the educator who had the role of embodying a disciplined discourse on children's nutrition - perceived herself in relation to her professional peers within and outside the group. When defending her perspective on the primacy of nutrition, she acknowledged that sustaining such point of view could cause her to be perceived as an old-fashioned, 'unevolved' educator. Some time after the exchange on nutrition, Eva took a further

step seeming to adopt the latter perception herself. She admitted that, in the context of the group discussion, she may not after all be the avant-garde educator she believed herself to be when she compared herself to the educators in her school. In a further possible identity shift, Eva seemed to keep negotiating her professional self-image almost a year later, as suggested in her follow up interview. While during the group interviews she seemed to lament the distance between some of her and her colleagues position-takings, when reflecting on the group interviews, with hindsight, she described having come to terms with these perceived differences. Eva explained that, given the context of her practice in a school-setting and its different challenges, it was only natural and even desirable for her to have a different understanding of her role. In addition, she asserted that engaging in this type of debate in the group interviews was exactly what had led her to reaffirm her contrasting positioning. In this way, the enactment of the educators' subjectivation processes in an intersubjective context seemed to provide opportunities for them to transform their professional self-images in potentially meaningful ways.

As seen in this section, my study's substantive contribution has consisted in the production of elaborated accounts of EC educators' professional subjectivation processes and the multiple dynamics involved in these processes. I have problematised and theorised the complex professional demands faced by EC educators, the very sophisticated identitary expressions of the educators in response to these demands, and the central role of their professional relationships to this response. My highlighting of the critical role of the unconscious in the negotiation of professional subjectivities is a particularly distinctive contribution of this thesis.

2. Methodological findings and distinctive contributions

This research has offered an empirical exploration of groups of EC educators in which not only group functioning was interpreted psychoanalytically, but also the educators' discourse was elicited using the psychoanalytic method of free association, and my overall conceptualisation of the problem of EC educator subjectivity was informed by a psychoanalytic conceptual framework. The concurrence of these three aspects gives this thesis a distinctive methodological character, contributing to the understanding of the different ways in which data can be produced in the context of research on subjectivity.

The methodological starting point of this thesis was that free-associative groups interviews constitute a productive research method that is especially suitable for the

exploration of professional subjectivities. This main proposition comprised three arguments: the unconscious is a productive notion with which to conceptualise subjectivity (especially its apparently unexplainable aspects); free association is a fruitful methodological tool for exploring the unconscious; and, the free association that emerges in groups is a distinctive mode of unconscious communication characterised by an intensified intersubjectivity that may elicit the emergence of intensified affects. Implementing these methods and my analysis of the data produced allowed me to ponder these three rather abstract arguments, identifying four concrete contributions:

- Free association is a surprising and insightful method. Its distinctive aim is to destabilise discursive coherence which allows the unveiling of some of what is unknown to the subject about themselves.
- Free-associative group interviews are a lively, productive method, which results in an intensified intersubjectivity that elicits the emergence of similarly intensified affects.
- Free-associative group interviews are a transformative method which offers a space of intersubjective creation where subjectivities can be destabilised and revisited.
- The method both stimulates and demands a shifting role for the researcher which sustains the production of free association and group functioning.

In what follows I present the main findings in relation to these four contributions:

An insightful, surprising method

The free-associative group interviews proved to be a distinctive and insightful method, particularly suitable for exploring the production of intricate professional subjectivities like those of the EC educators. The participants engaged in deep consideration and meaningful discussions of topics crucial to EC practice, whose foci and direction were critically determined by their own associations to open signifiers. Some of the method's particular characteristics such as its tolerance of prolonged silences and the absence of concrete questions to guide the discussions, seemed to elicit in the educators the emergence and mobilisation of unconscious affect, making it possible to glimpse some of their unconscious investments in their professional practices.

The method's concern with formal aspects of speech allowed me to trace affect and contents that were arguably unconscious to the educators, making patent how the irruption of the unconscious seems to exceed language, 'outsmarting' language's

attempt to master it. In relation to this, in Chapter 5 I explored Eva's accounts of having felt shocked and plainly 'ggrrrr' after one of the group discussions, without even remembering at first what was the discussion about. She remembered the exchange that had elicited these emotions in her shortly after, describing it as a display of 'fanaticism… I mean criticism… not fanaticism'. This attempt to qualify a strong notion like fanaticism, replacing it by a softer term first yet inexorably reaffirming it in its negation may illustrate the success of the unconscious in opening its way throughout language, getting its way with conveying intense affect, in spite of language's immediate effort to downplay it.

Contradiction constitutes another significant manifestation of the unconscious that was possible to glimpse through free association (discussed especially in Chapter 6). As seen in this chapter, the educators engaged in conflicting discourses about children, their relationship with EC knowledge, and the types of practice where professional meaning could be found, without registering the gaps and discontinuities between these discourses. In this case, as in several others, the emergence of contradictions was informative about the complexity of the professional subjectivities being studied.

The deeply expressive function of free-associative interviews arguably allowed the educators to express contents that are normally difficult to articulate. An example of this can be found in Chapter 7, where Amelia initially struggled to express something ineffable for her, 'I don't know how to say this', yet ultimately managed to articulate these thoughts and feelings, concerning the sadness of the loss of death. Unexpected content like this emerged several times throughout the interviews; the educators would often react with surprise to their own associations, sometimes to the point of not recognising a word uttered by them as theirs, even a couple of minutes after pronouncing it. As seen, the method is able to provide new knowledge about subjectivity that is valuable to the researcher and participants alike.

In relation to the conditions of production of this new knowledge, the participants' engagement in the free-associative activities did not seem to entail a constant awareness of the interview setting, and the overall research context. In this sense, their experience of the interviews may have had an immersive[102] quality, arguably freeing them from the potentially constraining effect of self-consciousness on the

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[102] Providing, involving, or characterized by deep absorption or immersion in something, such as an activity or a real or artificial environment (Merriam-Webster dictionary).

expressiveness of the method. An exception to this can be found in Chapter 7, as I describe next when discussing the efficiency of the method.

A lively, productive method

The free-associative group interviews constituted a remarkably efficient method for researching the unconscious; in a relatively short period of time it stimulated multiple reflections and rich accounts of the complex, multidetermined EC educator professional subjectivities. A first indication of this can be found in the educators' early ability to engage in profound and provocative exchanges about their profession. For example, the notably affectively invested exchanges that were the focus of the analysis in Chapters 5 and 7 started around the first five minutes of an interview session. In terms of the relative productivity of the six interview sessions conducted with each group of participants, with the exception of the first session in all cases the educators produced copious associations in the first minutes of the sessions. In the first interview, there were few associations developed perhaps because significant time was devoted to getting to know each other and going through the interview format.

Another indication of the efficiency of the method concerns the fact that the educators seemed to continue free-associating between the sessions, as seen in the way that some discussions seemed to build on exchanges in previous sessions. An example of this is addressed in Chapter 6, where the emergence of the notion of disenchantment (in relation to EC practice) seemed to draw on idealised understandings of vocation as 'being enchanted' by the profession, discussed in a previous session. The persistence of the signifier (dis)enchantment throughout the sessions may have signalled the continuation of a burdensome psychical work in which ambivalent feelings about vocation demanded further processing before they could be expressed. A destabilisation of repression may have taken place between these sessions ultimately making possible the appearance of negative associations around the notion of vocation, in spite of their potentially overwhelming concomitant affect. Similarly, the participants seemed sometimes to engage in an internal, parallel processing of their associations during the sessions, as exemplified in the analysis of the one-participant session in Chapter 7. While the educator in this session, Amelia, elaborated at length on biographical events apparently vaguely related to the formation of her professional identity, she described her engagement in the interview as a deep exploration of the question of why she became an educator. Furthermore, as I describe below in my comment on the transformative potential of the method and as seen in their individual follow up interviews conducted almost a year after their participation in the study, the

educators seemed to have continued processing the group discussions they took part in after the series of initial interviews had finished.

A crucial aspect of the free-associative interviews and key to their efficiency was their group modality. As explained in detail throughout the thesis, the group dynamics that emerged in each interview session seemed to invigorate the free-associative work, intensifying the expression of unconscious affect and its swift circulation among the group participants. As seen in Chapter 5, the discussion of mundane aspects of everyday EC practice rapidly evolved into a subjectively interpellating moral debate; Delia and Ida in Chapter 6 promptly engaged in an unisonant account of children echoing and completing each other sentences while Amelia in Chapter 7 overwhelmingly came to signify her artefact as a confirmation of her being a subject. I have suggested that this intense affective mobilisation was possible as group functioning seemed to persist in all the sessions, even those attended by only two or one participants as in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively. In this way, different group formats allowed me to conduct prolific free-associative interviews in which the group dynamics elicited were able to intensify the free-associative work beyond specific group configurations.

It bears noting that, unlike the other group configurations, the one-participant interview with Amelia was not characterised by an escalation of affect. In turn, this format seemed to stimulate a profound early introspection experienced by her as a deeply decentring process. This significant destabilisation of Amelia's subjective positioning seemed to create in her a certain need to regain awareness of the interview context in order to distance herself from a potentially ungovernable experience. This could be seen in her frequent need, during the session, to corroborate that her associations were the product of following the free-associative rule.

As explained previously, the dyadic alliance formed by Ida and Delia, explored in Chapter 6, seemed to have engaged in pairing, a specific modality of group functioning. This was arguably possible both because of my presence in the session, as a pairing functioning is especially stimulated by the presence of an-other, and as an effect of the overarching group process within which the free-associative interviews took place. Similarly, as I further develop below when discussing the role of the researcher, a group functioning may have been present as well in the one-participant interview with Amelia, analysed in Chapter 7. My engagement with Amelia during this interview also seemed to entail a dyadic functioning with pairing characteristics, which may have had the purpose, among other functions, of preserving the overall group process. This

flexible use of the notion of pairing resonates with versatile approaches to Groups theory such as Civitarese and Ferro's (2013) view that analytic couples constitute a group in themselves and, more relevantly, Szykierski's (2010) observation that 'literal' dyads can also engage in pairing, as they can be understood as part of a larger group situation.

A transformative method

My use of free-associative group interviews in the context of this study has suggested a subjectifying effect of the method. This can be seen especially in Chapter 6, where Delia and Ida's joint free-associative work opened a space of intersubjective creation. In this shared space, they were able to create unconscious artefacts with an emotional function. For example, they produced extreme discourses of EC education with the aim of strengthening a feeling of sameness and, ultimately, of creating an idealised EC researcher subjectivity in a process that I described as the emergence of the subject of projective identification. In my use of this concept I expanded traditional conceptions of projective identification which allowed me to theorise groups - and more generally - thirdness as a place of construction of subjectivity with no pre-existing subjects. Ultimately, the free-associative group interviews were instrumental in enabling the emergence of an intersubjective relation from which to produce and explore professional subjectivities. At a more general level, as exemplified in Chapter 5, seeing their professional selves through the eyes of others both destabilised and problematised the educators' professional self-images, inviting them to revisit their assumptions and investments in EC practice. A further subjectifying effect was explored in Chapter 7, as abovementioned, where Amelia described the act of narrating her multiple identity positionings - through her artefact - as an affirmation of her subjectivity.

As previously described, during the individual follow up interviews, the educators easily recalled their engagement in the free-associative group interviews conducted almost a year before. They vividly recollected the emotions they had experienced during some of the exchanges and described having revisited many of the debates that took place during the interviews, examining their (and other's) interventions, and even reconsidering some of their own perspectives. All of the above may suggest an internalised capacity to continue processing the contents and emotions elicited by the free-associative work. At the same time, contrary to my expectations, the educators did not seem to develop a particular interest in the process and evolution of the group as whole, exclusively focusing on their individual experience of participation. This may

relate to the immersive character of the educators' engagement in the activities which may have compromised their meta-awareness and curiosity about the group process.

The shifting role of the researcher

One of the findings of this research is that the different number of educators in each free-associative group interview seemed to affect my visibility within the group, both stimulating and demanding of me different modes of intervention. As discussed in Chapter 5, the interviews with four or three participants did not require significant intervention from me other than my presence and listening. There were few moments in which I seemed to emerge from this partial invisibility, notably, when I punctuated associations that were particularly surprising to the educators - apparently perplexing them - which seemed to increase their awareness of the interview context.

In the interviews with two educators, I seemed to play a larger role in terms of the elicited unconscious dynamics. Most of the time, the participants worked towards the creation of a cohesive dyadic alliance whose strength seemed to stem, to a great extent, from a fantasised triadic conflict and the concomitant antagonising and exclusion of a third group member (in this case, me, in the role of researcher). An example of this could be seen in Chapter 6, where Ida and Delia declined my invitation to explore representations of children (one of the activities of this interview), as they equated this task with the idea of rigidly defining them.

A crucial related finding is that I, as a researcher, was as subjected as the research participants to the effects of group functioning. That is, I was also affected by the mobilisation of intensified affect, the concomitant emergence of defence mechanisms, and the possibility of acting out. An example of this can be found in the one-participant session with Amelia analysed in Chapter 7, where I give an account of how the method led me to an active engagement with her fantasised relation to her artefact and the subsequent emergence of an unconscious relation between the two of us. In particular, I inadvertently asked questions about her artefact (a doll) in an animistic manner, further stimulating her fantasised associations. While I initially saw these interventions as a plain request for more information, later it became evident how the particular way in which I intervened had the clear function of sustaining our unconscious dyadic functioning. Similarly, as discussed in the Methodology chapter, my attempts to avoid acting out negative feelings towards a participant led me, in one of the sessions, to both project these feelings onto the group participants and censor their expression of this

(or any) potential negative affect. By doing this, contrary to my research aim, it could be argued that I restricted the participants' engagement in the free-associative work.

As seen in this section, this study has contributed a thorough examination of free association groups as a research method for the study of professional subjectivities. I have provided a detailed account of the conditions of production of the method and characterised some of the unconscious dynamics that the method allowed me to trace.

This study is a continuation of previous work on the use of free-associative interviews in psychosocial research, pioneered by Hollway and Jefferson (2013) and expanded by Lapping and Glynos (2019). While Hollway and Jefferson crucially foregrounded the utility of tracing the unconscious elements of research participants' discourse, their focus on the interpretation of anxiety (and underlying defence mechanisms) fails to grasp the transformative, subjectifying potential of the method that I have identified in my research. Lapping and Glynos (2019) have productively acknowledged this potential, as seen in their theorisation of free-associative interviews as sites of transference. However, in spite of experimenting with group interviews, they have not explored in depth the possibilities and implications of a group format. My study precisely contributes with this exploration, offering a thorough theorisation of the intensifying effect of the group in free-associative interviews. In this way, my use of a group modality of free-associative interviews and identification of the ways in which group functioning may optimise the expressive potential of free association, constitute the distinctive methodological contribution of this thesis.

3. Final remarks

This study is a contribution to the fields of Psychosocial Studies and Early Childhood Education. In particular, my empirical work with EC educators has created psychosocial knowledge on the production of teachers' professional subjectivities.

Conceptually, this thesis has produced an understanding of the unconscious as a means to think about the formation of professional subjectivities. Specifically, my use of the psychoanalytic notion of projective identification as an analytic tool extends both previous conceptualisations of projective identification and theorisations of professional subjectivities. Similarly, my flexible use of the psychoanalytic frameworks of intersubjective thirdness and tertiary phenomena has foregrounded the utility of transposing clinical concepts to the consideration of educational subjectivities.

Methodologically, this research represents a contribution in the domain of teacher groups, evidencing how groups offer a versatile research method for the exploration of teacher subjectivities, beyond their use as mere instances of professional development. Furthermore, my work with free-associative group interviews has expanded the use of free association as a tool for empirical research, showing how the unconscious dynamics inherent to group functioning amplify the productivity of free association as a mode of unconscious expression. Free association's foregrounding and prolific use of the critical role of the Other in the production of subjectivity can open novel possibilities in social research.

In terms of limitations and possible future directions, it is worth noting that this study was based on a small sample composed of a very specific profile of EC educators, all of whom practised in a capital city. As different subjectivities located in different contexts are probably produced differently, it would be interesting to continue researching groups of teachers from other geographical areas, and in so doing to seize the opportunity to experiment with different prompts and starting points for the group discussions, other than their representations of children.

My incipient thematic exploration suggested some potential avenues for further research. One of these concerns the understanding of professional borders in EC education. As seen in my thematic discussion in Chapter 6, the educators in this study indicated shifting views on the matter. They saw a benefit in keeping permeable professional boundaries with other relevant disciplines, as interdisciplinarity seemed to enhance the perceived professionalism of EC education, while, at the same time, they wanted to be characterised as having a highly specialised and unique professional discourse. In this sense, their investment in traditional understandings of professionalism may not be strictly instrumental, as they seemed to genuinely adhere to them (for example, to the notion of knowledge monopoly) at some level. Following this line of inquiry could contribute to the production of more complex, textured understandings of EC education professionalism. Another productive suggestion emerged from the thematic discussion in Chapter 5, concerning the possibility of segregation within the EC profession. This was illustrated in the case of a school-based EC educator, who described being doubly othered by schoolteachers and kindergarten educators. In relation to this, it could be argued that the impossibility of fully identifying with a school or a kindergarten subjectivity may lead school-based educators to develop something like a liminal identity, which will be necessary to explore and characterise in order to problematise fantasies about the cohesiveness of

the workforce. More generally, this exploration could defy oversimplified understandings of the relation between educators and their contexts of practice, and how these contexts affect the construction of their professional identities. Lastly, the thematic discussion of Chapter 7 raised an interesting suggestion concerning the primacy of the maternal in EC education. There was indication that the educators' efforts to delineate a strong professional identity had, among other aims, the purpose of validating a maternal practice. In this way, their desire to be perceived as professionals may have been largely instrumental to their sustaining a maternal relation with children. Continuing to explore this could enable a destabilisation of unidirectional views on the role of the maternal in EC education professionalism and inform critical approaches to the subject.

Inspired by Clarke and Moore's (2013) research stance, I have tried to defy limited understandings of teachers' identities which define good teaching in terms of compliance to itemised professional standards. I have glimpsed some of the deeper ways in which 'not just anyone can be an EC educator', which go way beyond educators' abilities to memorise and recite pedagogical and content knowledge. This highly neoliberal understandings of where EC education professionalism lies reinforce the reproduction of unattainable normative identities, which fail to capture the substance of what it means to be an EC educator or to acknowledge the multidetermined character of EC practice.

As I have suggested, EC practice produces enigmatic professional subjectivities formed in and of the circulation of intense unconscious affects which traverse and animate pedagogical relations. The way in which projective identification shapes the educators' identities invigorates the mobilisation and enactment of this intense affect; it permeates the staffroom, the classroom, the kindergarten, and wider societal debates on EC education in unexpected and potentially menacing ways. The educators' relationship with children is arguably the most enigmatic aspect of their practice; a practice that we discern is potentially demanding, fulfilling and deeply enjoyable. However, we do not really know how the educators' relation with children - these puzzling, unpredictable, unconstrained-by-language subjects - is enacted in the classroom. While the deep emotion and concomitant sense of risk that characterises any engagement with children can be experienced by others (outside the classroom), the relationship of EC educators with children is arguably unique. Crucially, educators produce their professional identities in this relation, in ways that often entail a strong identification with children. The identificatory processes through which educators

engage in deep ways with children's minds may invest educators with critical knowledge about children, informing their views about how children should be perceived and treated in different spheres of society. In the case of Chile, it can be argued that this crucial knowledge was confined, until very recently, within the kindergarten. It is possible that the indeterminacy and elusiveness of this knowledge, along with EC educators' increasing awareness of the importance of their role, may be experienced by Chilean society as unsettling if it were somehow 'unleashed' as educators continue to reclaim their voice in the overall public debate in EC education. This proliferating engagement of Chilean EC educators can be seen in their taking part in demonstrations and their articulation of demands concerning their working conditions. In relation to this, educators are distinctively aware of the perils of the increasing schoolification and imminent marketisation of EC settings; they actively resist these and other pervasive effects of neoliberalism on their practice and professional subjectivities. As outlined in the thesis, neoliberalism insidiously shapes EC educators' professional identities by shaping the environments they work in in ways that undermine their agency and, ultimately, their sense of professionalism. Chilean EC educators' lucidity about this state of affairs makes them potentially dangerous political subjects.

As Chile's socio-political landscape seemingly (and hopefully) will continue changing, the social positioning of EC educators will keep changing; a subjective shift that it will be critical to continue looking at. The question about what makes the subjectivation of Chilean EC educators both so appealing and menacing remains productive, and could also be fruitfully informed by the perspectives of other relevant social actors.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: References of media articles

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Appendix 2: Participants' attendance to each of the group sessions

Session	Morning				Noon			
	Amelia	Juana	Rafaela	Violeta	Blanca	Delia	Eva	Ida
1. 'EC education'	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. 'The párvulo'			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
3. EC-related artefacts	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
4. The Chilean EC curriculum	✓		✓			✓		✓
5. Pedagogical biographies	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Interview extracts	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
7. Additional social meeting					✓			✓
Total:	5	2	4	2	6	5	5	7

Appendix 3: Basic statistics of the datasets

Group sessions:

		Audio	Transcripts	
Session	Group	*length*	*pages*	*words*
1	Morning	00:54:00	20	8811
	Noon	00:56:00	24	10807
2	Morning	01:06:00	20	11156
	Noon	01:03:00	29	11278
3	Morning	00:56:00	18	7867
	Noon	01:04:17	25	12170
4	Morning	01:13:10	34	12681
	Noon	01:01:40	25	10431
5	Morning	01:02:39	26	11651
	Noon	01:08:15	33	12694
6	Morning	01:02:19	26	8820
	Noon	00:59:15	20	9107
Sums:	12 sessions	12:26:35	300	127473
	Averages:	1:02:13	25.0	10622.8

Follow-up interviews:

		Audio	Transcripts	
Group	Participant	*length*	*pages*	*words*
Morning	R	00:18:43	7	3279
Noon	B	00:27:06	11	5034
	D	00:24:34	9	4572
	E	00:41:07	16	7640
	I	00:26:06	11	4993
Sums:	5 interviews	02:17:36	54	25518
	Averages:	0:27:31	10.8	5103.6

Appendix 4: Amelia's artefact

Amelia's artefact: Mickey