

Xu, Yuwei (2015).

A both 'Gendered' and 'Non-gendered' profession: teachers' and children's perceptions of gender and teacher-child interactions in Scottish and Chinese early childhood settings

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Abstract

This research aims to address the global shortage of men who work with young children in early childhood education and care (ECEC), by investigating whether or not men and women teachers interact with children differently. If yes, this research hopes to demonstrate the diversities that both genders can contribute to ECEC. This is a comparative study between Scotland and China (including Mainland China and Hong Kong). Both contexts are relatively under-researched regions in this research area. This study, therefore, wishes to add further international perspectives into the topic. It draws upon theories of post-structuralism, Holmes, 2007, and regards gender as socially constructed, Francis and Skelton, 2003. People may 'do' and 'perform' gender similarly and differently as results of negotiations between social-gender structure and individual agency. This project selected 5 early childhood settings in each of the three regions. In each setting, one man and one woman teacher who jointly teach the same group of children (aged 3 to 6 years old) were chosen, as well as those children in the groups. Methods used included interviews with teachers, visual activities with children, and observations. This research is approved by the research ethics committees of the Universities of Glasgow and Hong Kong. Interactions between teachers and children can be both 'gendered' and 'non-gendered' in various ways in different cultures. These will be further illustrated in the presentation. Having both men and women teachers in ECEC is one way of challenging traditional gender stereotypes. It also presents children with gender inclusion and diversity.

Keywords

gender, early childhood education and care, teacher-child Interactions, cross-cultural, diversity

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Gender imbalance in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce as a global phenomenon:

Britain: 2% of staff working with the under 5s are male (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2011)

Scotland: 4% of pre-school teachers are male in 2012 (The Scottish Government, 2012)

Mainland China: 2% of pre-school teachers are men (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2012)

Hong Kong: There were only 126 male kindergarten teachers in 2010/2011, making up 1.2% of the workforce (Ho & Lam, unpublished)

Reasons for the paucity of men ECEC workers;

Reasons for the increase of men in ECEC;

· *Male Role Model*

Traditional gender roles?

'Gender-diversified' societies?

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- **'Working towards a gender-neutral profession' (Peeters, 2013)**

--- Both 'suitable' men and women should be valued as individuals;

--- Respecting equality and diversity, be inclusive;

--- Pay attention to individual teachers' experiences



- **To bring new forms of evidence and insights to current debates on men working in ECEC**

- **To examine them in previously unresearched contexts**

- **To shed light in relation to policy analysis**

--- *why it is that policy initiatives internationally have so far failed to lead to an increase in the number of male teachers in ECE - see Mills et al, 2004; Peeters, 2007)*

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Research Aims

- **To explore the views and experiences of both male and female teachers, and of other key stake holders such as children and their parents** (*most existing studies have focused on male teachers only - for example, Robb, 2001; Tsigra, 2010*)

- **To be a comparative study among Scotland, Hong Kong, and Mainland China;** *Almost all studies of this issue have been conducted solely in the 'minority' world/the global 'North' (see for example, Williams [1989] [U.S.A], Skelton [2003] [England], Sumsion [2005] [Australia])*

- **To understand the ways in which cultural-specific conceptualizations of gender add to the complexity of the debate in particular regions around the world**



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Theoretical Framework

Post-structrualism


- **Gender as fluid and flexible;**
Gender is something we 'do' and 'perform'.

- **Structure V.S. Agency**

- **Intersectionality**
Gender is among one of the categories that are affecting how our world operates intersectionally (others may include class, ethnicity, culture, etc.).

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Research questions

- What are interactions between teachers and children like in EC settings in Scotland, Hong Kong, and Mainland China? Whether these interactions are gendered or not? And if yes, how?
- What are teachers' and children's perspectives of their (gendered) interactions with each other in EC settings in the three comparison cultures?
- What are the cultural-specific gender discourses that impact on teacher-child interactions in the three comparison cultures? And how?

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Research Design



- **Methodology**
 - **Observations** on teacher-child interactions in EC settings.
 - **Interviews** with 30 participants (15 from each country), all early childhood teachers (including 10 from each country).
 - **Pictorial Activities** with 30 participating teachers and children.
 - **Informal conversations** with 30 teachers to gain contextually informed knowledge.

- **Data sources**
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Class description

	Center 1	Center 2
Class	The Panda's	The Daisy's
Age Group	3 - 5 yrs old	3 - 5 yrs old
No. of kids	Around 20	Around 20
No. of Staff	4 Early Years Workers (1 man)	4 Early Years Workers (1 man)
Time slots	09:30-15:00	09:00-14:30
Days visited	6	5
What I did	Familiarization/Informal Talks	Interviews with teachers
	Observations	Activities with children

Pictures of classrooms

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Selected provisional themes/topics from the observations

Teacher

--- Disciplinary behaviours;

--- Caring, including:

- **Taking children to the toilet;**
- Eating, i.e distribution of dishes, feeding;
- Afternoon nap;
- **Hair braiding (for girls);**
- **When children are crying;**
- Other caring behaviors.



- **Dealing with Conflicts Between Children**
- **Asking Children for Help with Minor Stuff**
- **How Teachers Treat Boys and Girls Differently (if any)**
- **Interactions with Colleagues**
- **Labor Activities**

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Children

- **Complaining Behaviors ('Gaozhuang')**
- **Seeking for Help from Teachers**
- **Teachers' Connections with Mothers and Fathers as Perceived by Children**
- **Children's Own Gender Conceptions and Behaviors**
- **Teachers in Children's Eyes**



Children's Emotional Expressions

Children's Interactions with the Researcher (Me)

- Treating me as a teacher;
- Treating me specifically as a man;
- Other relevant interactions.

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Both

--- Physical Contacts

--- **Hierarchical Power Relationship**, including:

- Hierarchy between teachers (*as perceived by children*);
- Teacher's power difference (*through children's reactions*).

--- Physical Activities & Education

--- Teacher-Child Relationships

--- Dressing and Outlook; & Its Impact on Teacher-Child Interactions




Teacher-Child Interactions in General Activities, including:

- Roll call;
- Free activities, i.e play, corner activities;
- Teaching activities;
- Story telling;
- **Line up**;
- Morning/Afternoon exercises;
- Other activities, i.e singing, reading poetry.


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 **Scotland**

- Male teachers as 'different' men figures; *Good/Caring/'Non-violent'*;
- **Compesent for absense of fathers;**
- A girl who was especially cautious of my presence;
- Boys and girls who like my cuddles/lifting;
- **Women teachers have more physical contacts with kids, especially kissing;**
- Men teachers changing nappies;
- Men and women teachers share the same responsibilities;
- **Fathers talked to men teachers more often;**
- **Kids talking about their dads to me;**
- **A boy's story.**

Both 'Gendered' and 'Non-gendered'!



Example of a 'gendered' profession - **Physical education;**

- Teachers' perceptions
 - “Maybe it's that he is a man standing there, and it gives you a feeling that it is different. I'm not sure.” (By a female teacher in Tianjin)
 - “Men tend to be more active and energetic when leading the activities, and children will therefore be active and enegetic, too.” (By a male teacher in Hong Kong)
- Chilren's perceptions
 - Largely based on their expereinces, in schools, at home, in the wider community, and on TV.
 - “Girls don't know how to play football, they go to shopping a lot instead.” (Hong Kong)
 - “Girls hate to get wet, it's dirty.” (China)

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Example of a 'non-gendered' profession - Teaching activities;

- Teachers' perceptions

"We take turns to lead different activities most of the time."

"We may be good at different things. For example, Ms *** is much better than me in musical activities and arts, whereas I am better at sports." (By a male teacher in Hong Kong)

"It's more about personalities I think." (By teachers in Edinburgh)

- Children's perceptions

"I like *** more because her voice is much softer."

"I like *** more because he is funny."

"Because it is fun."

"Because I do this with ***."

Reflection

China: Confirming men's dominance over the society;

Hong Kong: Worrying about men's incapability;

Scotland: A gender-neutral and -diversified environment.

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- From 'national' or 'cultural-specific' point of views;

Understanding of gender and culture?

Changing society?

Adaptation?

Respect or challenge?

Play within or beyond rules?

- From 'global' or 'cross-cultural' point of views.

- Equity;
- Diversity;
- Inclusion.

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Thank you !
Questions/comments are appreciated.

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