



**What do we know about male early
childhood teachers and their professional
responsibilities? Perspectives from China.**

Yuwei Xu, Tianjin Normal University, China/University of Glasgow, UK

Manjula Waniganayake, Macquarie University, Australia



Early Childhood Workforce GLOBAL CONTEXTS



Proportion of men in the EC workforce:

- In general, in many countries = **<10%** (**1-4%** in most western countries)
- **Denmark & Spain: 8%**-highest (Jensen, 1996; Sumsion, 2005);
- **U.S: 2.3%** of staff who work in pre-schools and kindergartens are men (MENTEACH, 2012)
- **UK: 2%** of staff working with the under 5s are men (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2011)
- **China: men comprise only 2%** of preschool teachers (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2012).

From the literature review

Considerable debate on whether or not to attract more men to the ECE profession

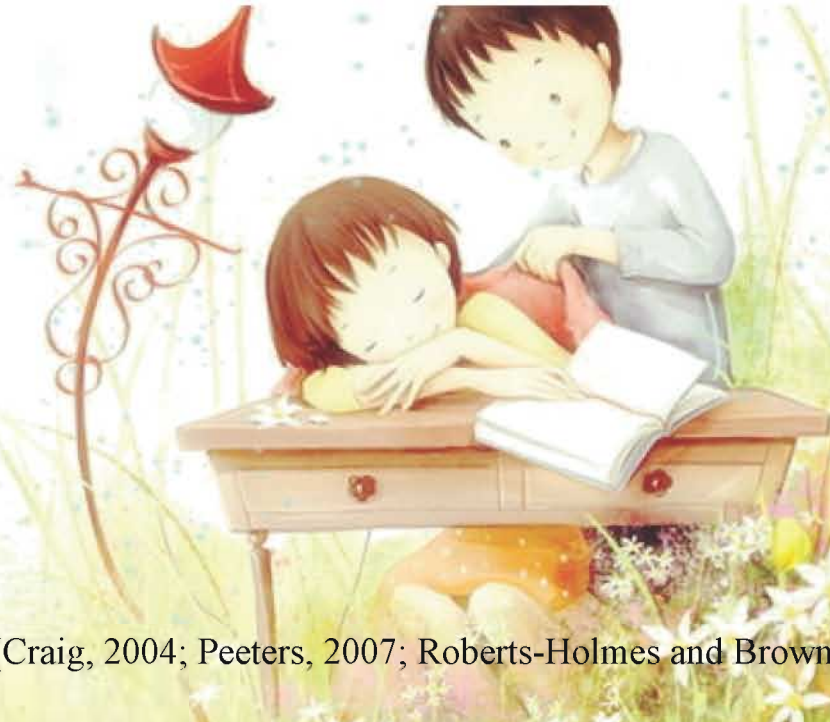
For ①:

- Children's developmental needs, sense of identity and gender construction (Craig, 2004; Tsigra, 2010).
- Children lack a masculine 'role model' that is aligned typically with the child's father (Jensen, 1996; Craig, 2004; Rentzou and Ziganitidou, 2009; Tsigra, 2010).

Against ①:

- Children may encounter various gender identities at home, in their families (extended families) and in the community (Heward, 2000).





For @:

- **Role models for boys** (Craig, 2004; Peeters, 2007; Roberts-Holmes and Brownhill, 2012).

Against @:

- No precise description of what an appropriate male role model is; the boundaries between masculinities and femininities are ambiguous (Frosh et al, 2001; Robb, 2001).
- Men may behave as other female teachers do, in order to make themselves fit the environment (King, 2004).

Against ③:

- **Confirming hierarchical views towards men and women** (Sumsion, 2000).
- **Female teachers' educational contribution is denigrated** (Ashley, 2003).
- **'Glass escalator effect'** (William, 1999), which confirms *'the ultimate domination of high status occupations and positions in society by males'* (Ashley, 2003, p.265).



Research gaps

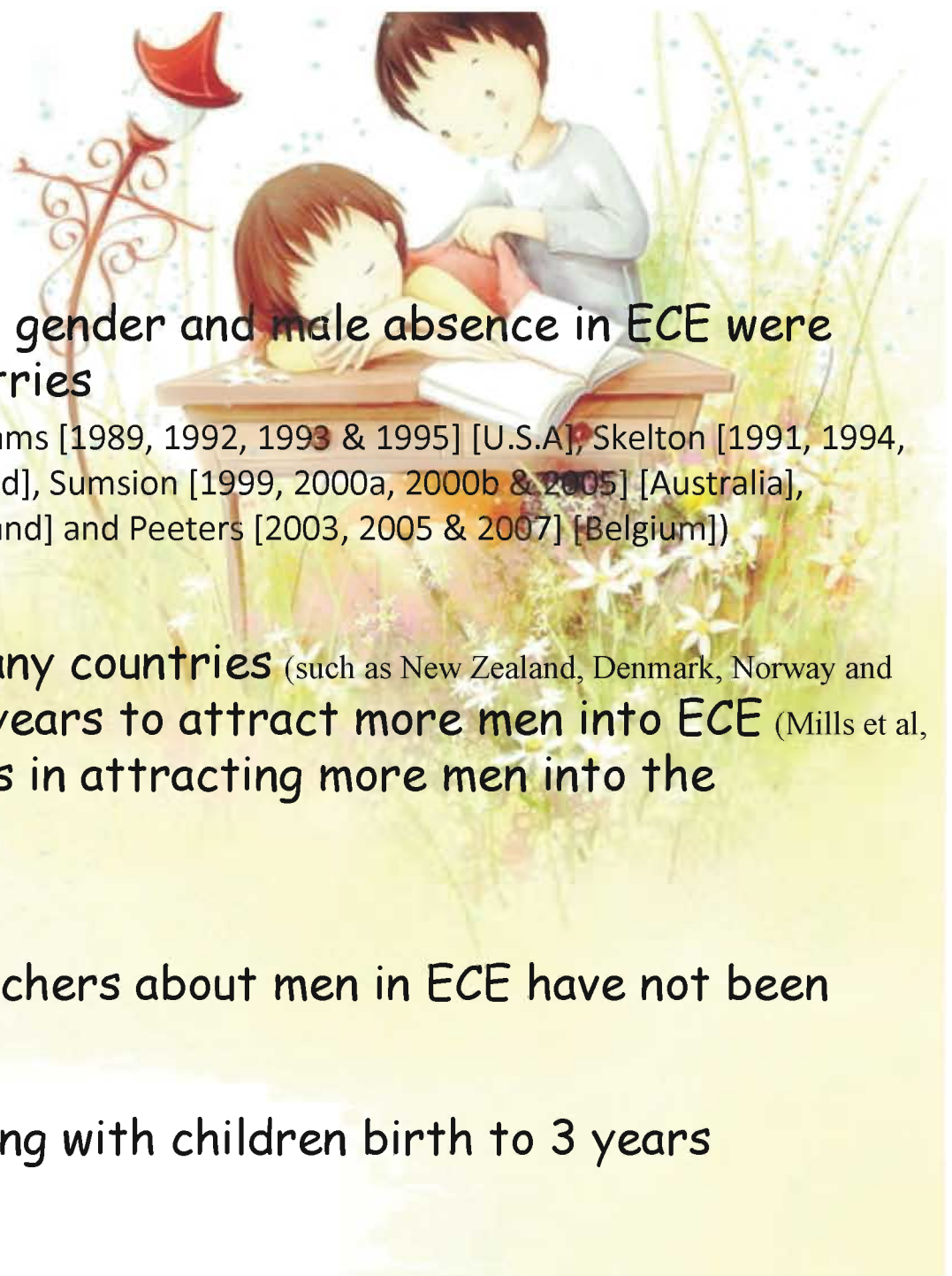
* Almost all known projects on gender and male absence in ECE were conducted in Western countries

(e.g. King [1997, 2000 & 2004] [U.S.A], Williams [1989, 1992, 1993 & 1995] [U.S.A], Skelton [1991, 1994, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003 & 2009] [England], Sumsion [1999, 2000a, 2000b & 2005] [Australia], Farquhar [1997, 2005, 2007] [New Zealand] and Peeters [2003, 2005 & 2007] [Belgium])

* Despite the policies that many countries (such as New Zealand, Denmark, Norway and Britain) have launched in recent years to attract more men into ECE (Mills et al, 2004; Peeters, 2007), the relative gains in attracting more men into the profession have been limited.

* The voices of women EC teachers about men in ECE have not been sufficiently heard.

* No studies about Men working with children birth to 3 years



Research objectives

An illustration of two children, a boy and a girl, sitting at a wooden desk in a field of tall grass and small white flowers. The girl is leaning over the desk, reading a book, while the boy sits behind her, also looking at the book. The scene is peaceful and educational.

- To bring new forms of evidence and insights to well-rehearsed debates about men in ECE
- To examine these debates in a previously un-researched context

ECE in China

- Public kindergartens (2-5)
- Private kindergartens (2-5)
- Early Childhood Centers (0-5/6)

- **Not compulsory**
- **Not free**



Political context

Calling on men to work in EC settings is seen as a way of increasing ECE quality and is among the catchphrases or slogans being used by the Chinese government.

* No nation-wide policies to date

* Regional policies in some developed provinces:

- **Jiangsu Province:** Boys could enjoy free higher education if he chooses to study early childhood education in university.
- **Zhejiang Province:** A goal to achieve 5% of male early childhood teachers has been set.

- *What happens to male teachers in the rest parts of the country?*
- *Whether a political call should be made to encourage male participation in early childhood education in other cities or even nation-wide?*



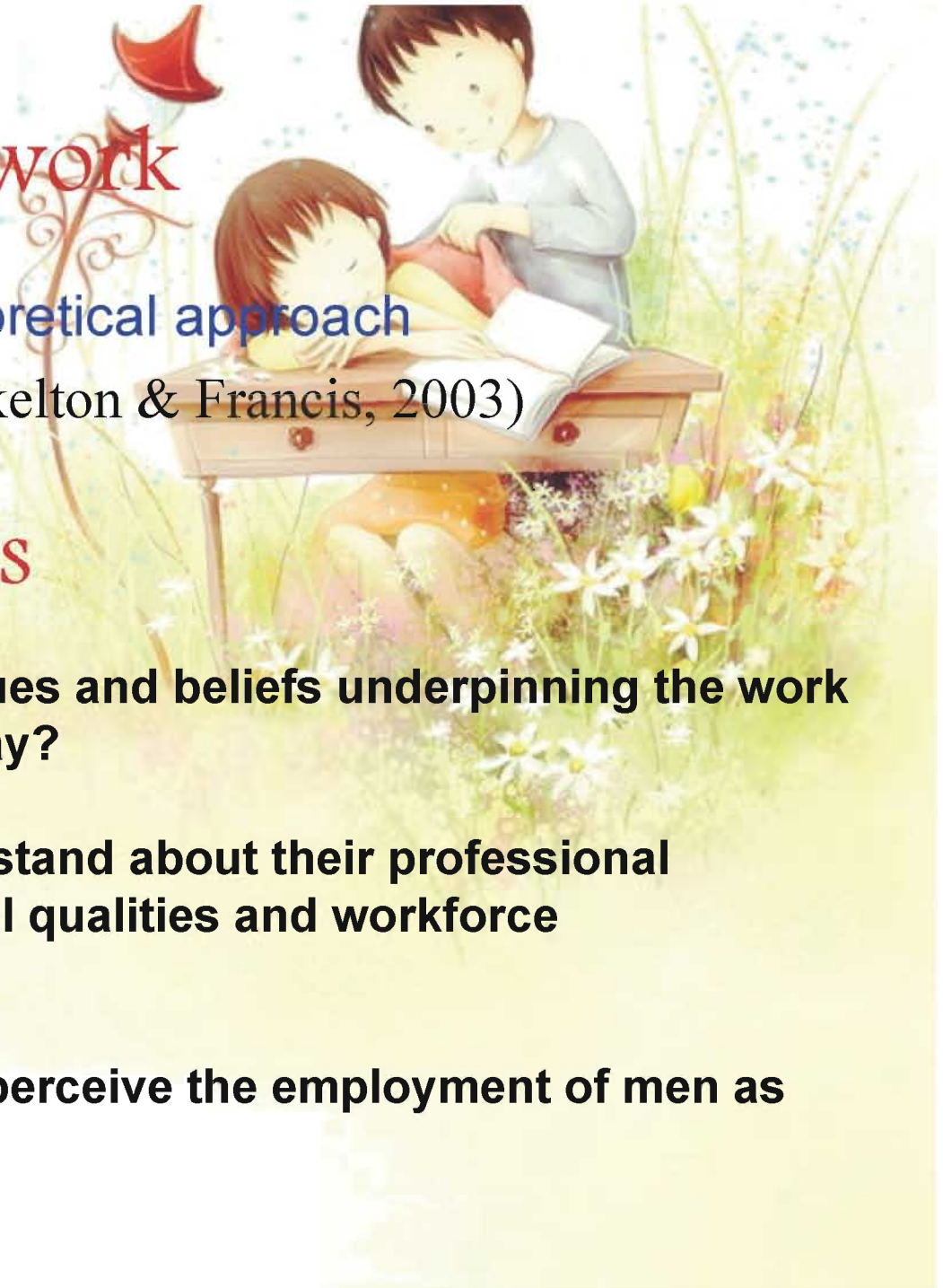
Theoretical framework

- * Social constructionist theoretical approach

(Skelton & Francis, 2003)

Research questions

- * What are the professional values and beliefs underpinning the work of ECTs working in China today?
- * What do ECTs in China understand about their professional knowledge and skills, personal qualities and workforce responsibilities ?
- * How do ECTs in China today perceive the employment of men as ECTs in their country?



Method & Participants

Method

- Recruitment --- 'Snowball' sampling
- Data collection
 - Semi-structured online interviews
 - Online questionnaires

Participants

8 men and **8** women (n=16) from **3** regions in China, namely *Beijing*, *Tianjin*, *Taiyuan*

See Table 1 for participants' information





Beijing: China's capital city

Tianjin: One of the municipalities

Taiyuan: Capital city of Shanxi Province

Economic level: Beijing > Tianjin > Taiyuan

Key themes

- Professional values and beliefs
- Professional knowledge, skills and personal qualities
- Workforce responsibilities
- Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs



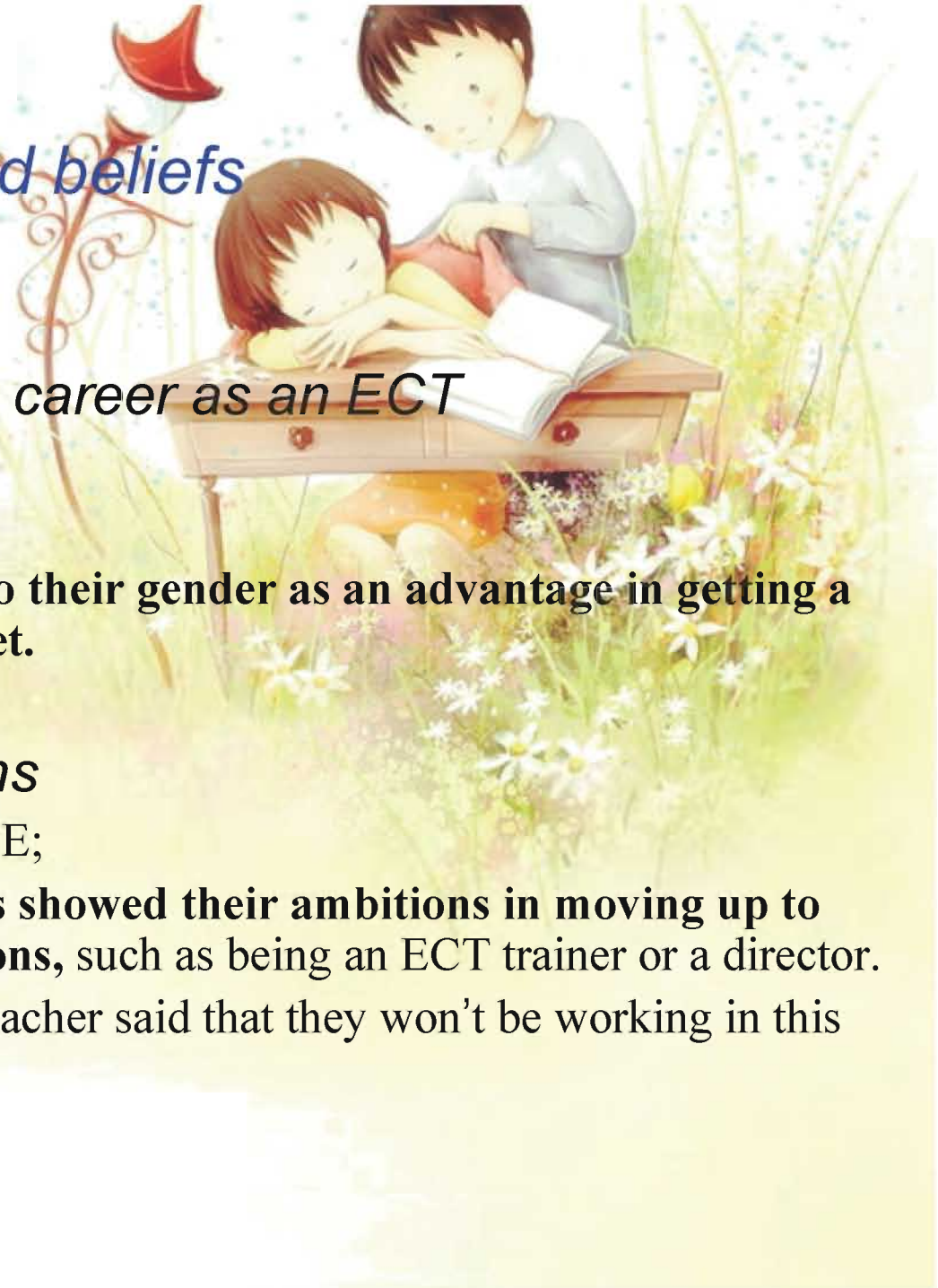
Professional values and beliefs

--- Motivations to choose a career as an ECT

- * Love for children/education;
- * ECE majored;
- * **3 men (out of 8) has referred to their gender as an advantage in getting a position in the ECE job market.**

--- Future professional plans

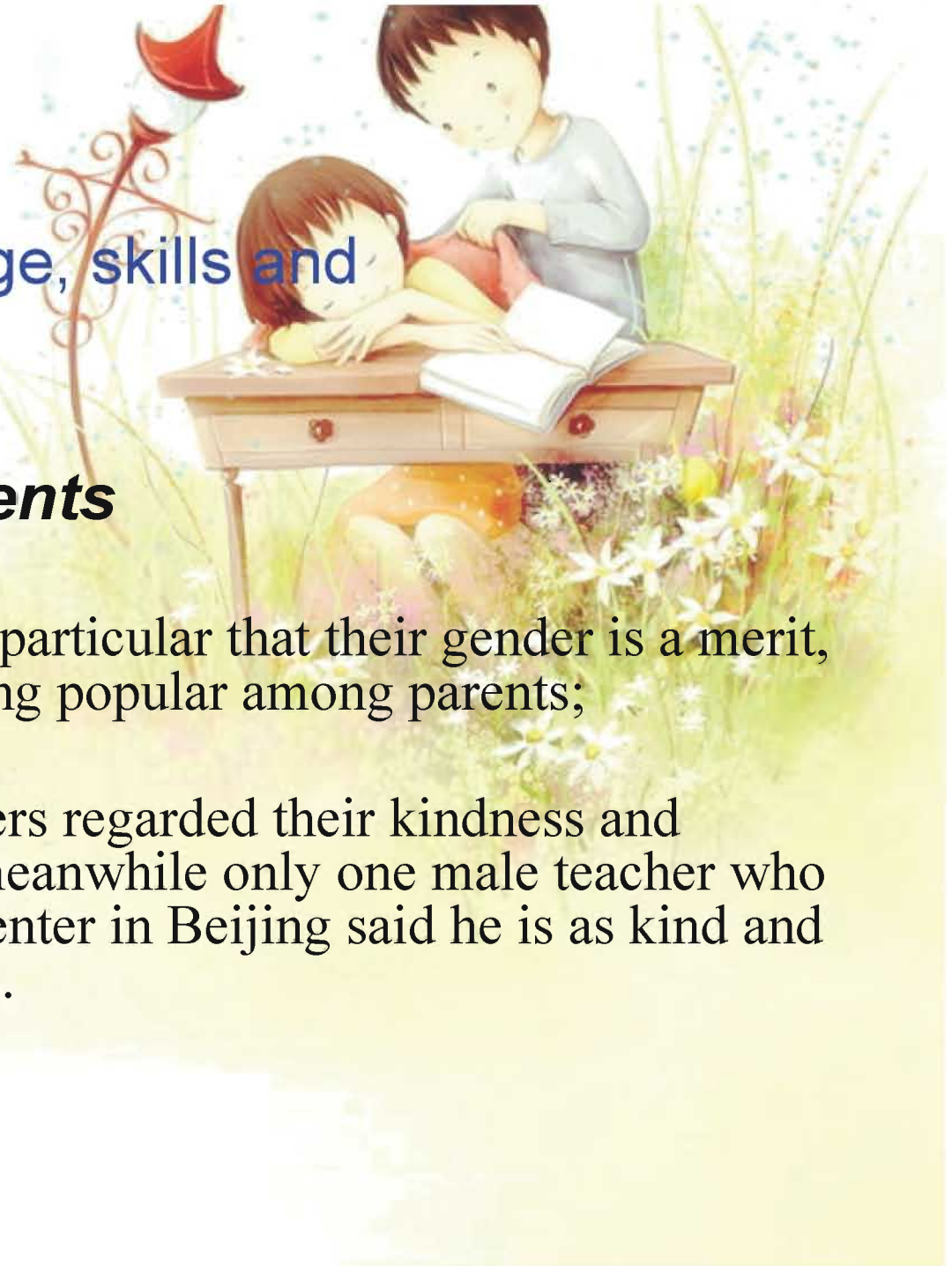
- * Willing to remain working in ECE;
- * **Both male and female teachers showed their ambitions in moving up to managerial or research positions, such as being an ECT trainer or a director.**
- * Only one male and one female teacher said that they won't be working in this field any more



Professional knowledge, skills and personal qualities ①

--- Strengths and talents

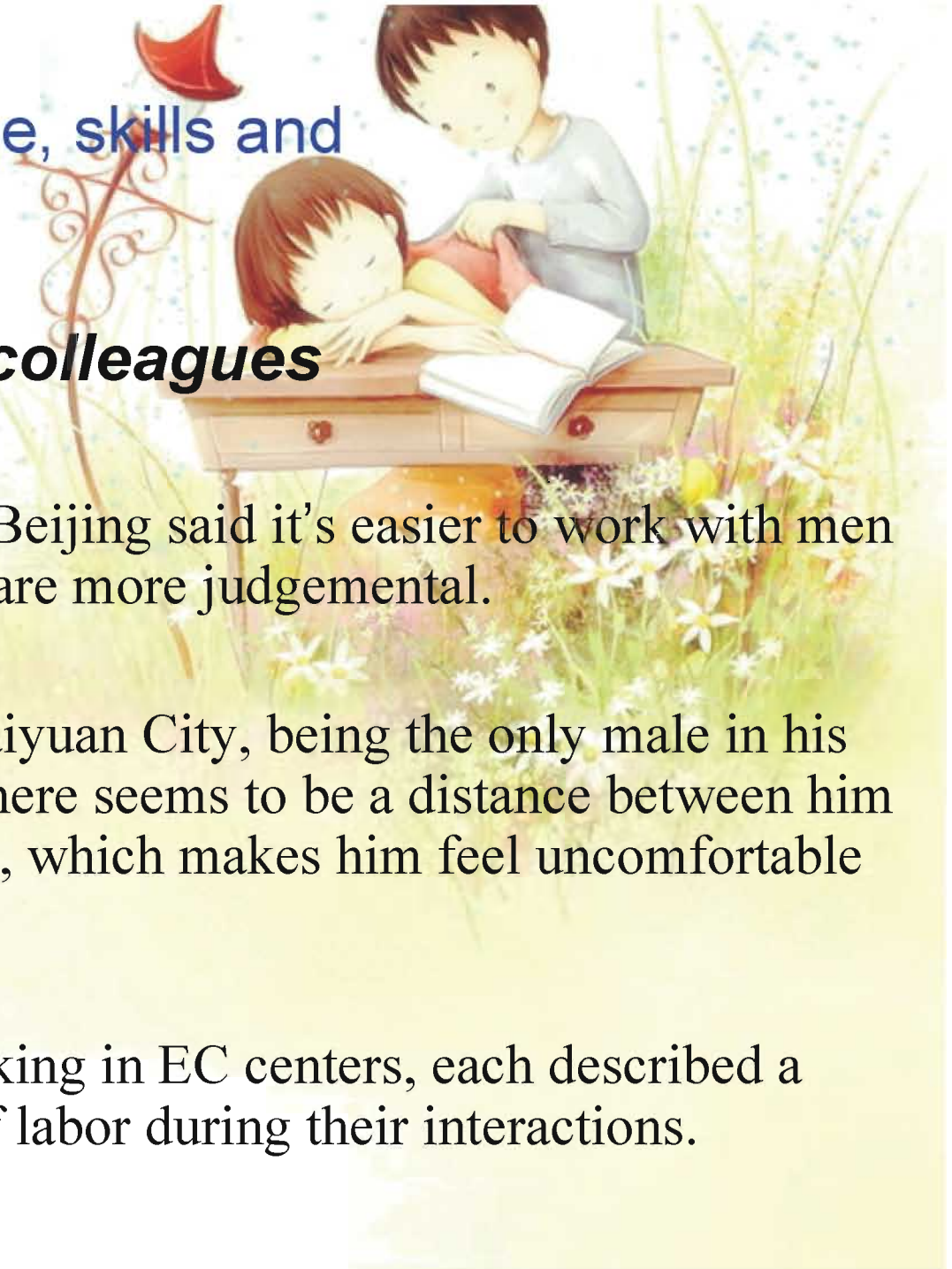
- * 5 men (out of 8) stated in particular that their gender is a merit, being a role model or being popular among parents;
- * 6 women (out of 8) teachers regarded their kindness and patience as advantages, meanwhile only one male teacher who worked in a private EC center in Beijing said he is as kind and patient as female teachers.



Professional knowledge, skills and personal qualities ②

--- Interactions with colleagues

- * One female teacher from Beijing said it's easier to work with men teachers because women are more judgemental.
- * One male teacher from Taiyuan City, being the only male in his workplace, thought that there seems to be a distance between him and his female colleagues, which makes him feel uncomfortable and lonely.
- * Two other men, both working in EC centers, each described a type of gender division of labor during their interactions.



Professional knowledge, skills and personal qualities ③

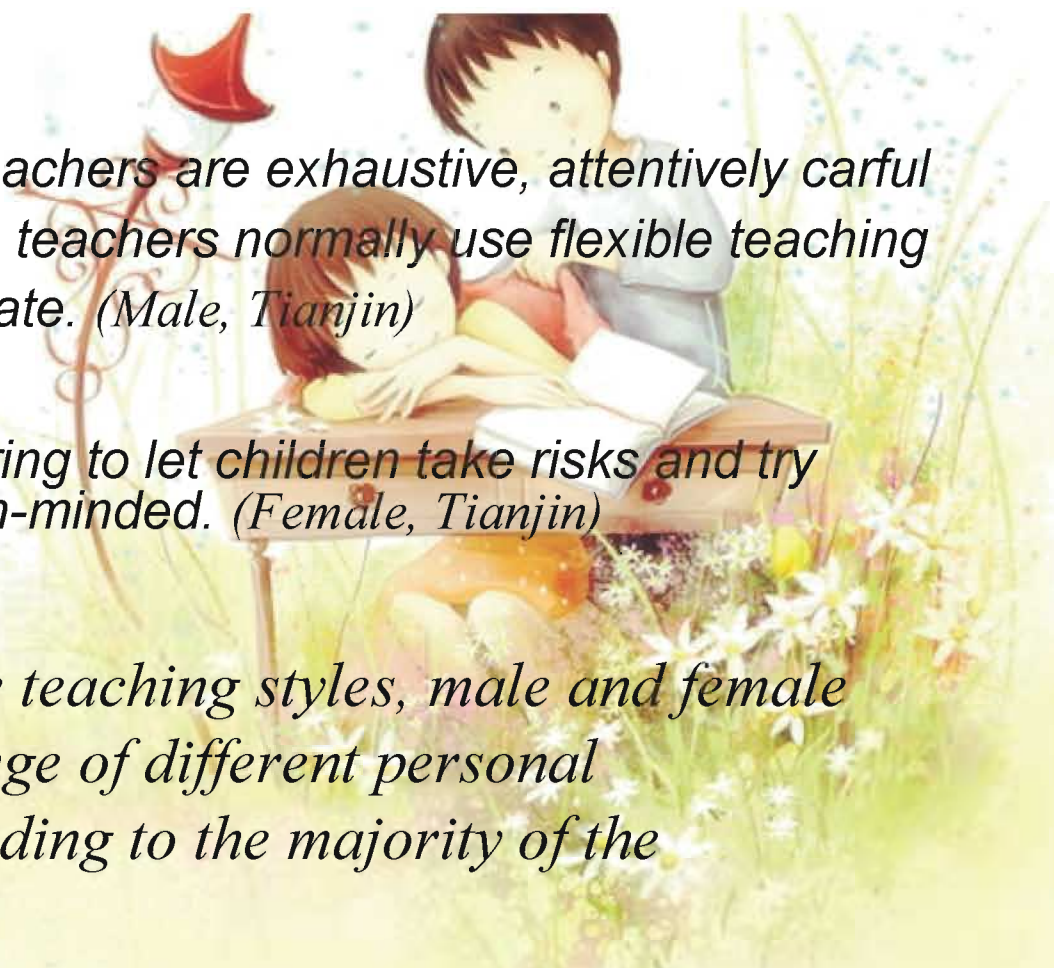
--- Gender differences in teaching

* The most remarkable differences (indicated by 5 men and 4 women) lies in their **teaching styles**, with male teachers adopting a more flexible and open style whilst female teachers employing a more reserved and disciplined one.

· Female teachers are meticulous, are patient and kind with kids. But even male teachers in good temper may sometimes lose their temper when interacting with children. [...] Men are born to play, hence my dream is to be a 'child king', and play with children. Through playing, I can improve my relationship with children, and make them grow up happily. (Male, Tianjin)

· For those female teachers I have seen, they may be quite reserved and stick to the policy. (Female, Beijing)



An illustration of a young boy and girl sitting at a wooden desk in a field of tall grass and white flowers. The boy is on the right, leaning over the desk, and the girl is on the left, sitting at the desk. There is a red flower-like object hanging from a vine above them.

· Teaching methods of female teachers are exhaustive, attentively careful and more traditional. While male teachers normally use flexible teaching methods, generous but appropriate. (Male, Tianjin)

· They[Male ECTs] are more daring to let children take risks and try new things. Male ECTs are open-minded. (Female, Tianjin)

**In addition to the distinctive teaching styles, male and female ECTs also demonstrated a range of different personal qualities/characteristics according to the majority of the participants.*

--- Qualities such as being meticulous, patient, gentle, rigorous, and kind are more often attached to female ECTs;

--- Male ECTs are more likely to be rough, physical, 'playful', lively and/or passionate.

* Other less frequent but interesting differences:

- *Female teachers often give children roles like bunny and cats, while male teacher usually ask them to play soldiers, cops, guardians, etc. (Female, Taiyuan)*
- *Female teachers normally teach children to be quite in daily life and teaching. As a result, some boys are gradually becoming too shy. Whilst male teachers teach kids more about perseverance and hard-working. Boys may also be brighter when taught by men. (Male, Tianjin)*
- *Maybe some male teachers may have more patterns. There are some physical things that women teachers cannot do, including lifting children high. Women teachers are more intimate to children, with less big movements. (Female, Taiyuan)*
- *Most female teachers regard themselves as conductors in the teaching process, while males are more likely to perform themselves as children's peers. (Male, Tianjin)*
- *I treat kids as equal, and not regarding myself as a teacher. To children, I am an elder brother who plays games with them. (Male, Beijing)*

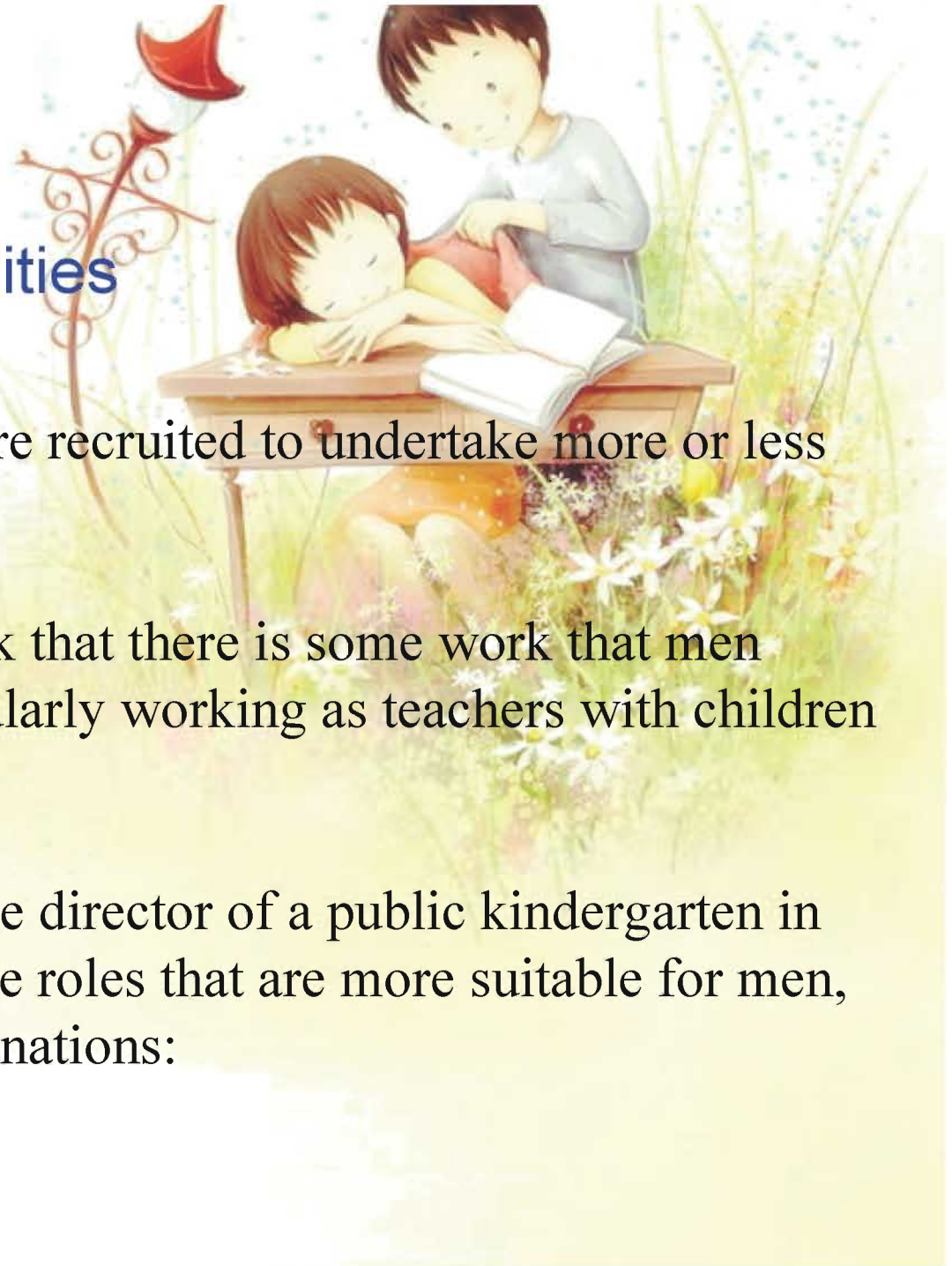


Workforce responsibilities

* Men and women ECTs are recruited to undertake more or less the same responsibilities.

* 2 men and 3 women think that there is some work that men should not be doing, particularly working as teachers with children from birth to two years age.

* One female teacher, as the director of a public kindergarten in Tianjin City, described some roles that are more suitable for men, and provided relevant explanations:





D: They[Men] are more suitable for teaching elder children (4-6 yrs old), participating in school management and research, and taking their advantages in areas such as bilingual education, physical education, and arts education, areas that require creativity and motivate strong will.

R: Could you please explain the reasons?

D: Well. When teaching younger children, there involves more caring work which male teachers are weak. For example, when kids piss, how could a male teacher respond to that? Not that they cannot do that, but lack experience. But in order to cultivate children's qualities like hard-working and tolerance, male teachers' masculinities are needed to be modeled from, to encourage children. Men and women are essentially different, and it is necessary to take advantages of each group's merits in the workplace.



Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs ①

--- Male ECTs' perceptions

- * All 8 male participants were positive about the differences that men can make to ECE and to children's development, such as providing boys with male role models.
- * Except for the one male teacher who has already quit his job as an ECT, all the other male ECTs said that they would recommend teaching in ECE to other men (actually some of them have already done so). They also thought that there will be more boys working in ECE in the future.



- *From my point of view, ECE is a profession sustained by women, while men are responsible for moderating in this field. Calling for an increase of male participation is not indicating that males are more suitable for this area than women, but is recognizing particular influences that men could have on ECE. Such influences are reflected in both child development and gender balance. Further, in term of numbers, the ratio of men and women in kindergartens should be scientific, with women outnumbering men. (Male, Taiyuan)*
- *As a male ECT, I would like each kindergarten to have male ECTs so that children could learn to be strong from male teachers and boys could learn to be men. Having been working in this job for one year, I see lots boys who are attached to their mothers and are less masculine. I want boys to be responsible and man since childhood. (Male, Tianjin)*

An illustration of a young boy and girl sitting at a wooden desk. The girl is leaning over the desk, resting her head on her arms, while the boy sits behind her, looking at an open book. The desk has two more open books on it. The scene is set in a field of tall grass and small white flowers, with a red flower on a vine to the left.

Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs ②
--- **Female ECTs' perceptions**

* All overwhelmingly supportive:

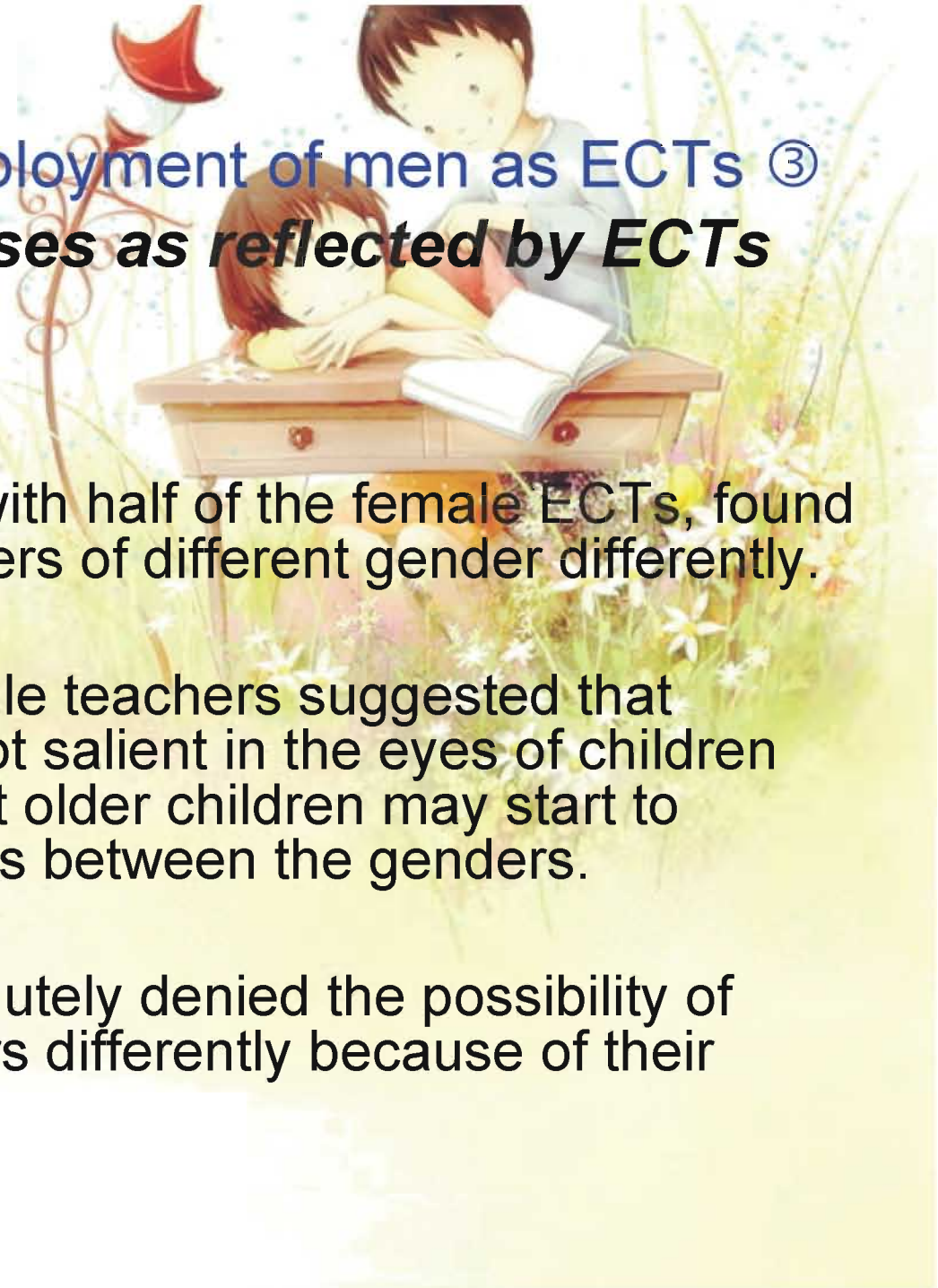
"I am supportive of having men who are interested in ECE and love children to participate in ECE. Male participation could balance the gender ratio in ECE, moderate the environments; it could also help with the construction of children's masculinities, enrich teaching styles".

(Female, Tianjin)

Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs ③

---- *Children's responses as reflected by ECTs*

- * 7 male ECTs, together with half of the female ECTs, found that children treat teachers of different gender differently.
- * One male and two female teachers suggested that teachers' gender was not salient in the eyes of children below 3 years old, whilst older children may start to recognize the differences between the genders.
- * Two female ECTs, absolutely denied the possibility of children treating teachers differently because of their gender.



An illustration of a young boy and girl sitting at a wooden desk in a field of tall grass and white daisies. The boy is leaning over the desk, and the girl is sitting at it. There are some red leaves or petals floating in the air around them.

Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs ④

--- Parents' responses as reflected by ECTs

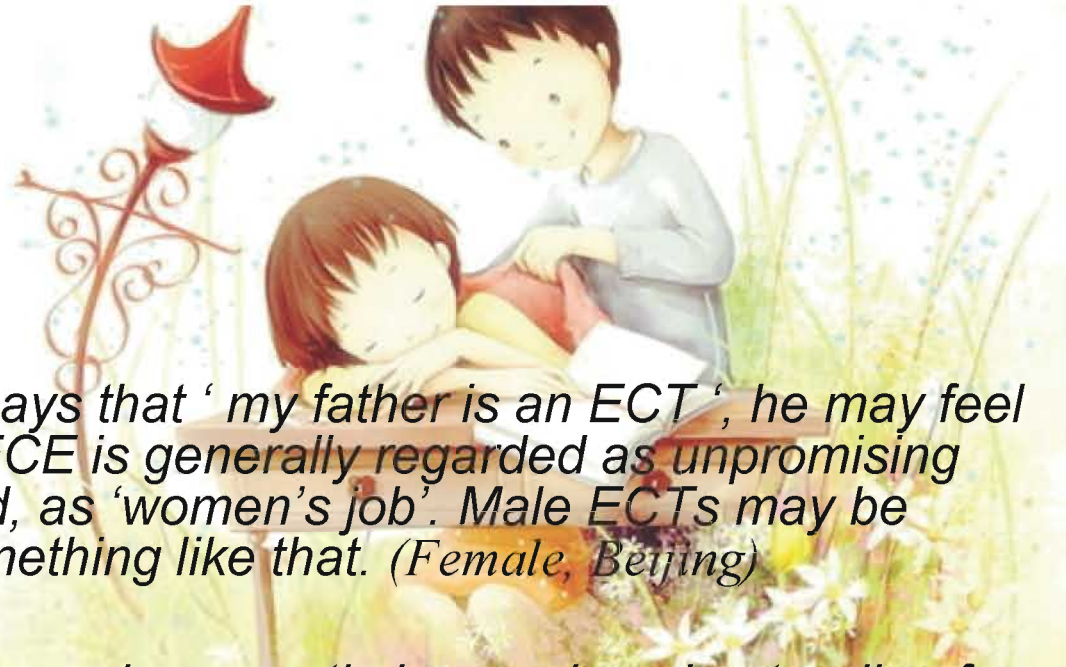
- * All ECTs except one either agreed or completely agreed that parents have different expectations of male teachers
- * Parents often prefer classes by male teachers to those by female teachers.
- * Parents normally were less rigorous and were more considerate and tolerant with male teachers than with female teachers.
- * Parents were sometimes worried about male teachers' inability to care for children



Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs ⑤

--- Public perceptions as reflected by ECTs

- * 4 participants, all female, thought male ECTs have **high** social status and their impacts are valued.
The majority of male teachers (5 out of 8) considered their social status to be **moderate**.
3 male and 4 female ECTs, in contrast, claimed that male ECTs have **low or poor** status.
- * Some negative comments about male ECTs included being abnormal or ‘girly’/feminized or being dangerous.
- * The society lacks an understanding of ECE, assuming it is only about caring, and about education. Meanwhile in Chinese tradition, caring for children is regarded as ‘women’s job’. In such cases, ECE as a profession is largely considered to be weak and men who work as ECTs are especially discriminated.



- *To say in this way, if a child says that ‘ my father is an ECT ‘ , he may feel ‘humiliated’. In this country, ECE is generally regarded as unpromising and financially disadvantaged, as ‘women’s job’. Male ECTs may be considered to be ‘girly’ or something like that. (Female, Beijing)*
- *Affected by traditional views, people currently have misunderstanding for EC workers. They think EC workers are ‘aunts’ who care for children, and even those who only attend secondary school are competent. If a girl works in a kindergarten after graduation from university, most people would be surprised, even feel sorry for you, doubt your competence and abilities. Not to mention boys. What is more, male ECTs are usually described as unambitious, unpromising and incapable. (Female, Taiyuan)*
- *A parent would very much like his son to be taught by a male teacher in kindergartens, but when the son grows up and are choosing his own career, the parent would never allow him to be an ECT because he/she thinks it’s shameful, it’s unpromising. (Female, Tianjin)*

Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs ⑥

--- *Reasons for male under-representation in ECE in China and corresponding solutions*

* Reasons

- Low social status accompanied with low salaries;
- Lack of understanding about ECE, just caring, no education;
- Traditional views that men are bread winners, that ECE is a 'women's job';
- Lack of professional development space/platform.

* Solutions

- Community education to change traditional views about men's involvement in ECE (which requires long-term endeavors);
- Promote the real value of ECE;
- Increase ECTs' salaries;
- Provide male ECTs with access to appropriate professional development and support;
- Support men to choose ECE as a career by supporting their university studies, with financial incentives (e.g. scholarships);
- Joint efforts by the government and other social groups.



Reflections

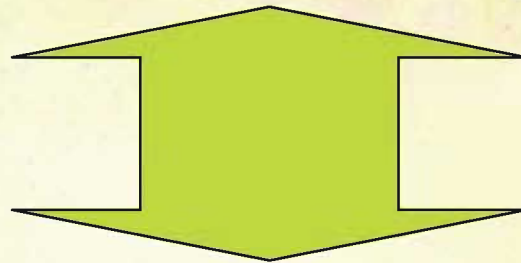
- * The circumstances of male ECTs in China are quite similar to those in Western countries in relation to low salaries and low status;
- * Overwhelmingly all participants agreed that male and female ECTs have different working styles with children, and this was based on their gender;
- * Participants in studies from Western countries were more critical of the possible gender differences between how male and female ECTs work with children. Instead, they take into account of other factors such as personal qualities, academic qualifications, and experience.



An illustration of two children, a boy and a girl, sitting on a wooden bench in a field of tall grass and small white flowers. The boy is leaning over the girl, and they are both looking at an open book. The scene is peaceful and evokes a sense of childhood and learning.

A tension between dreams and realities

- Love of Children (dangerous)



- Working as an ECT (education)



* Professional qualifications and continuing development

----- **urgent**

Can the professionalisation of the ECE sector raise its **social status** and **salaries**?

Recommendations for policy

An illustration of two children, a boy and a girl, sitting on a wooden bench in a field of tall grass and small white flowers. The boy is leaning over the girl, and they are both looking at an open book. A red leaf or petal is falling from the sky above them. The background is a soft, yellowish-green wash.

- * Policies could be made to encourage men to work as ECTs, but meanwhile female ECTs interests should not be disregarded
- * An established framework for ECTs' professional development is necessary

An illustration of two children, a boy and a girl, sitting at a wooden table in a field of tall grass and small white flowers. The boy is leaning over the table, and the girl is sitting at the table. There is a red umbrella in the background.

Recommendations for further research

- * Voices of a mix of stakeholders including male & female ECTs, parents, children, and other EC professionals;
- * Cross-cultural studies, preferably between Western and non-western countries
- * If male and female ECTs work differently with children, what is the long-term impact?

References

- 
- Alloway, N. (1995) *Foundation Stones: The construction of gender in early childhood*, Melbourne: Curriculum Corporation.
 - Ashley, M. (2003) Primary School Boys' Identity Formation and the Male Role Model: An exploration of sexual identity and gender identity in the UK through attachment theory, *Sex Education*, 3:3, 257-270.
 - Butler, J. (1999) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge.
 - British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, BERA.
 - Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods*, 4th edition, New York: Oxford University Press.
 - Centre for Early Childhood Leadership (2004) *Directors' Perceptions About Male Involvement in Early Childhood Programs*, Research Notes, National-Louis University.
 - Chan, A. (2011) *Feminising and Masculinising Primary Teaching: A critical examination of the interpretive frameworks of male primary school principles in Hong Kong*, *Gender and Education*, 23:6, 745-759.
 - Children's Workforce Development Council (2011) cited in the Guardian consulted on 16/01/2012, 'Early years development: why it is a job for the boys', <http://www.guardian.co.uk/local-government-network/2011/feb/09/early-years-teaching-job-boys>.
 - Clark, A. & Moss, P. (2001) *Listening to young children: the Mosaic approach*, London: National Children's Bureau for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
 - Connell, R. (2005) *Masculinities*, 2nd edition, California: University of California Press.

- Craig, D.A. (2004) Males Studying and Working in Early Childhood Education: Advantages, barriers, challenges and examples of successful strategies to recruit, retain and support men, Engaging Fathers Project, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, NSW.
- Deem, R. (1997) consulted on 27/01/2013, 'Focus Groups', <http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/interviews/focusgroups.htm>.
- Frosh, S., Phoeux, A. & Pattman, R. (2001) Young Masculinities: Understanding boys in contemporary society, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hannan, A. and Kelly, P. (2006) consulted on 27/01/2013, 'Observation Techniques', <http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/observation/obshome.htm>.
- Heward, C. (2000) 'Masculinities and families' in Mac an Ghaill, M. (2000) Understanding Masculinities: Social relations and cultural arenas, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Jensen, J. J. (1996) Men as Workers in Childcare Services, European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities.
- King, J.R. (2004) The (Im)possibility of Gay Teachers for Young Children, Theory into Practice, 43:2, 122-127.
- MenTeach (2012) consulted on 08/12/2012, 'Data About Men Teachers', http://www.menteach.org/resources/data_about_men_teachers.
- Mills, M., Martino, W. & Lingard, B. (2004) Attracting, Recruiting and Retaining Male Teachers: Policy issues in the male teacher debate, British Journal of Sociology of Education, 25:3, 355-366.
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2012) consulted on 12/11/2012, 'Data on Staff and Workers in Junior Secondary Schools are included in the data of Regular Schools', <http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s6200/201201/129612.html>.
- Peeters, J. (2007) Including Men in Early Childhood Education: Insights from the European experience, NZ Research in Early Childhood Education, 10, 15-24.
- Pole, C. and Morrison, M. (2003) Ethnography for Education, Open University Press.



- 
- Rentzou, K. (2011) Greek Parents' Perceptions of Male Early Childhood Educators, *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 31:2, 135-147.
 - Rentzou, K. and Ziganitidou, K. (2009) Greek Male Early Childhood Educators: Self and societal perceptions towards their chosen profession, *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 29:3, 271-279.
 - Robb, M. (2001) 'Men working in childcare' in Foley, P., Roche, J. & Tucker, S. (eds) (2001) *Children in Society: Contemporary theory, policy and practice*, Hampshire: Palgrave & Open University.
 - Roberts-Holmes, G.P. (2009) 'People are Suspicious of Us': A critical examination of father primary carers and English early childhood services, *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 29:3, 281-291.
 - Roberts-Holmes, G. (2011) *Doing Your Early Years Research Project: A step by step guide*, 2nd edition, London: SAGE.
 - Roberts-Holmes, G. and Brownhill, S. (2012) 'Where are the men? A critical discussion of male absence in the early years' in Miller, L. and Cable, C. (eds) (2012) *Professionalization, Leadership and Management in the Early Years*, London: SAGE.
 - Skelton, C. (2003) Male Primary Teachers and Perceptions of Masculinity, *Educational Review*, 55:2, 195-208.
 - Skelton, C. (2009) Failing to Get Men into Primary Teaching: A feminist critique, *Journal of Education Policy*, 24:1, 39-54.
 - Skelton, C. and Francis, B. (2003) *Boys and Girls in the Primary Classroom*, Berkshire: Open University Press.
 - Smith, J. (2004) Male Primary Teachers: Disadvantaged or advantaged? Paper presented to the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, December 2004, Melbourne.



- Sumsion, J. (2000a) Negotiating Otherness: A male early childhood educator's gender positioning, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 8:2, 129-140.
- Sumsion, J. (2005) Male Teachers in Early Childhood: Issues and case study, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 20:1, 109-123.
- Tsigra, M. (2010) Male Teachers and Children's Gender Construction in Preschool Education, OMEP-World Congress, August 11-13, 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden.
- Williams, C.L. (1989) *Gender Differences at Work: Women and men in nontraditional occupations*, London: University of California Press, Berkeley.



Questions/Discussions

An illustration of two children sitting at a wooden desk in a field of tall grass and small white flowers. A girl with brown hair is leaning over the desk, reading a book. A boy with brown hair is sitting behind her, also reading. The scene is set in a bright, sunny field with a red flower on a vine to the left.

The end

Thank you!

Yuwei Xu: y.xu.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Manjula Waniganayake: manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au