

**EECERA SIG Gender Balance  
International Research Conference  
Hersonnisos, Crete, Greece, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2014**



Xu, Yuwei\* (2014)

**Researching gender from children's perspectives: Is the gender of early childhood teachers salient in children's eyes?**

Presentation on the SIG Gender Balance Research Conference, 7.9.2014,  
Hersonnisos/Greece

This project aims to examine whether or not teachers' gender is salient in children's eyes. The study will adopt a mosaic approach to explore 4 -5 year old children's opinions about their teachers. This presentation will mainly discuss methodological and theoretical frameworks, as well as ethical issues about doing research with young children. Possible methods would include, but may not be limited to, children's drawings (followed by informal talks), observations, and scenario analysis. The expected results shall inform current debates on the presence of men in ECEC, from a children's perspective and in terms of the differences (if any) that men may bring to teaching and child development in ECEC.

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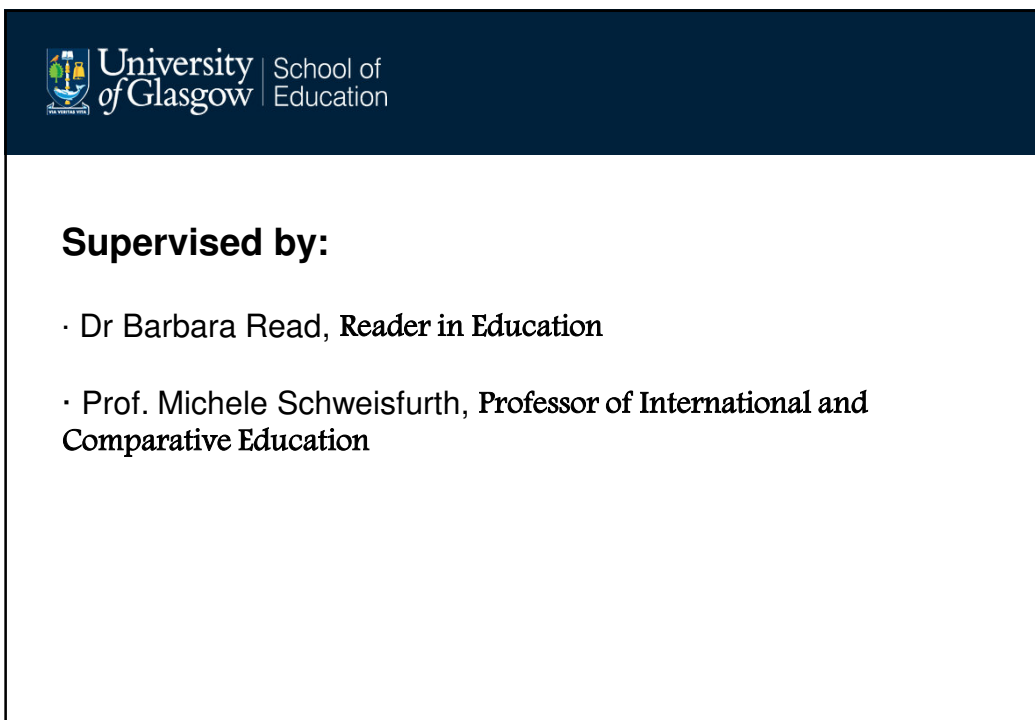
**A Cross-cultural Analysis of Gender and Teacher-child Interactions in Early Childhood Settings:  
Cases in Scotland, Hong Kong, and Mainland China**



**A Cross-cultural Analysis of Gender  
and Teacher-child Interactions in Early  
Childhood Settings: Cases in Scotland,  
Hong Kong, and Mainland China**

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**A Cross-cultural Analysis of Gender and Teacher-child Interactions in Early Childhood Settings:  
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- **Part I: Introduction to my PhD project**
- **Part II: Doing research with young children**



**Part I:  
My PhD Project**

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**Hong Kong:** There were only 126 male kindergarten teachers in 2010/2011, making up 1.2% of the workforce (Ho & Lam, unpublished)

- **Children's gender construction (Craig, 2004; Tsigra, 2010)**

- Children need to be exposed to a range of gender identities when constructing their own sense of identity

- Especially for children who have little or no regular contact with their fathers

**However ...**

**Children may encounter various gender identities at home, in their families (extended families) and in other social communities (Heward, 2000)**



- **One of a traditional male who possesses apparent masculine feature** (Tsigra, 2010)
- **Boys' academic underachievement (Post-ECEC Schooling)** (Skelton & Francis, 2003)

### However ...

- **No precise description of 'male role model'** (Robb, 2001)
- **No fixed, 'natural' connection between gender identity and pedagogical practice** (King, 2004)
- **Ambiguous boundaries between masculinities and femininities** (Frosh et al, 2001)



- **Interest of girls**
  - To increase male presence is essentially to confirm boys' advantages by privileging their masculinities, thereby confirming hierarchical views towards men and women (Sumsion, 2005)
- **Denigration of female teachers' educational contribution**
  - ECEC is to the detriment of boys because it lacks male staff, implying that females are not able to teach boys (Ashley, 2003; Mills et al, 2004)
- **'Glass escalator effect'** (William, 1989)
  - Male teachers are more likely to [secure promotion and] achieve managerial positions (Chan, 2011)



## Research Objectives

- **To bring new forms of evidence and insights to those debates**
- **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)*



## 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**



- **Mainly Post-Structuralist, with reference to other approaches such as Materialist, Social-constructionist;**
  - Gender is something we 'do' and 'perform';
  
  - How people 'do' and 'perform' gender is unavoidably constrained by certain social structures and norms;
  
  - However, the extent to how people's gender behaviours may be constrained by existing social regulations is also dependent on their own agency (one's abilities to make choices and changes);
  
  - And gender is among one of the categories that are affecting how our world operates intersectionally (others may include class, ethnicity, culture, etc.);



- **What are interactions between teachers and children like in EC settings in Scotland, Hong Kong, and Mainland China, as reflected in terms of gender?**
  
- **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?**

- **Ethnographic & Comparative** (Pole and Morrison, 2003)
    - **In-depth observations** of one day of the typical daily life that each teacher spends with their children, to observe how male and female teachers practice and 'perform' gender in interaction with their students (Butler, 1999).
    - **Interviews** with 30 teachers of children aged between 4-5 yrs (equally split between genders and countries), and from four or more ECE settings, to explore their perceptions of being an early childhood teacher (Roberts-Holmes, 2011).
- Three stages. Before the observation; During the observation; After the observation.
- **Informal conversations** with head teachers, and analysis of other available sources to gain a contextually informed knowledge concerning the societal conditions in the area.

- **Activities** (such as drawing tasks and follow-on discussions) **with the children** taught by participating teachers, taking a mosaic approach, particularly effective with young children (Clarke and Moss, 2001).
- Traditional methods are also to be considered!
- **Focus groups** with the children's parents (Deem, 1997)
- 
- **Thematic analysis & Content analysis** (Bryman, 2012)
  - **Participants as researchers** - both insider and outsider's views (Tisdall et al. 2009; Tobin et al. 2009)



- **Consultation with institutional guidances**  
*e.g.* The British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (2004)  
The Scottish Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (2005)
- **Contextual-appropriate**
- **'Fit for purposes'**
- ***Research with young children:*** Informed consent, confidentiality & anonymity, child protection issues, etc.



**Part II:**  
**Doing Research with Young Children**

- Children's best interests;
- Rights perspectives (UNCRC);
- Children as independent and competent individuals;
- Children have certain vulnerabilities and are 'different' from adults in certain ways (e.g. languages);
- Each single child is different;
- Childhood is constructed through intersections of social, cultural, economic, and historical factors.

- **Get access to children:** Network approach (Lewis and Lindsay, 2000)
- **Gaining consent:** A three-way negotiation with both children and parents/guardians, meanwhile other stakeholders (schools, teachers) respected;
- **Identities and presence:** Dress, settings, distance, etc;

- **Getting the children 'informed':**
  - Written work assisted by pictures, videos, leaflets, body languages, and teachers;
  - Giving consent using 'specific marks (in addition to signature);
  - 'Assent'
- **Revisiting consent**

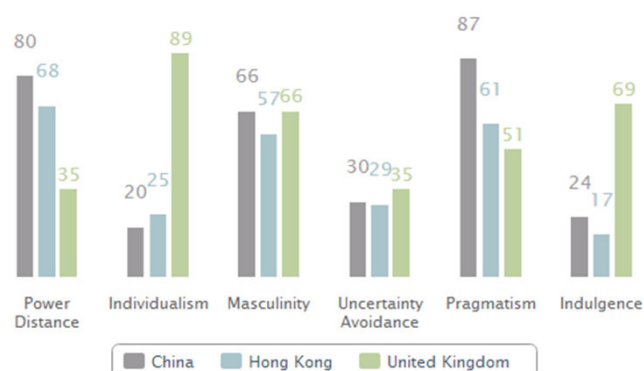
- **Allow the children to create their own pseudonyms (Tisdall et al, 2009);**
- **Parents' and teachers' 'curiosity';**
- **Child protection issues**



- **Negotiations between:**
  - Researchers and institutions;
  - Researchers and parents;
  - Researchers and teachers;
  - Researchers and the children;
  - Parents and children;
  - Teachers and children;
  - Institutions and teachers;



- **Cultural issues:**



(Hofstede, <http://geert-hofstede.com/china.html>)

- **Qualitative**
  
- **Ethnographic**
  - Researchers' influences in observations
  - Gender issue: myself being a male
    1. To children
    2. To research

- **To include a mix of perspectives/interpretations from children, teachers, and parents**
  
- **The Mosaic Approach** (Clark and Moss, 2001)

- **Stage I: Children and adults gathering documentation**

- Observation
- Child Conferencing
- Cameras
- Drawings
- Scenario analysis

**Subject to children's own choices (*consistency?*)**

- **'Lisenting'**

- All methods will be combined with informal talks with children

- **Parents' and teachers' perspectives**

- **Stage II: Piecing together information for dialogue, reflection and interpretation**
  - Find overlaps between methods and identify core themes  
*(validity and reliability)*
  - Perspectives and interpretation of teachers' and parents  
*Better understanding?*  
*Confidentiality*

- **'Fit for purposes'** (*Children's best interests?*)
- **Respond to contexts** (*Comparable?*)
- **Flexibility** (*Be prepared to unexpected*)
- **Creativity** (*Fun, engaging*)



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**Thank you!**

**Questions/comments are appreciated.**

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