

**TENSIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS IN THE DISCOURSE OF  
QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: POLICY  
DISCOURSE AND CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF  
PRESCHOOL IN CHILE**

Natalia Andrea Torres Carreño

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
School of Education

May, 2019





The  
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Of  
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## Abstract

Early childhood educational reforms have been at the centre of Chilean social policies during the last decades. Within these reforms, Quality has become a key concept in almost every policy design, where it appears to be treated as a goal in itself, rather than a concept linked to a particular discourse of education. As this thesis argues, the discourse of Quality risks becoming rather empty in meaning. In this form, it serves a political strategy that allows politicians to speak in 'known' terms, without entering meaningful and critical discussions that might contest the meaning of the concept. In this setting, Quality is associated with a rationalistic, economic and neoliberal discourse of education, which in the context of Chilean neoliberal policies in education has worked to maintain and reproduce the inequalities present in society. Adopting a postcolonial and feminist perspective, with a critical and interpretive approach to methodology, this research aims at understanding how Quality is conceptualised by key stakeholders and official documents. Additionally, I aim at understanding how such conceptualisation relates (or not) to the ways in which children make meaning of their preschool experience. I do so by employing a case study strategy consisting of one classroom of 3 and 4-year-old children in a public preschool in Chile, including observations and fieldnotes in the classroom, and participatory methods such as photographs and drawings made by children. Using thematic coding to analyse the information, key tensions emerged from the data relating to how practitioners and children are positioned in terms of their role in achieving Quality in ECE by the 'official discourse' as well as by how children make meaning of their experience. These tensions reflect power relations that influence how inequalities are maintained and reproduced within the ECE system. In response, this thesis considers whether positioning key actors within the preschool setting in an active role, may allow for the construction of spaces that promote resistance to and transformations of such inequalities.

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## PART I. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Hoy Chile está dando forma a un sistema donde se pueda acceder a una buena educación desde la sala cuna a la educación superior y técnica. Mejorar el acceso y mejorar la calidad: esos son los dos principios que sustentan todas las iniciativas de la reforma educacional, las que ya son ley y las que lo serán antes que termine el gobierno.

Queremos que nuestros hijos e hijas, sin importar donde vivan, tengan alternativas reales para recibir educación pre escolar, algo esencial para equiparar derechos y abrirles un mundo de nuevas posibilidades. Toda la evidencia muestra que el apoyo y estímulo recibido en los tres primeros años de vida marcarán sus oportunidades en el futuro.

*Today Chile is giving shape to a system where you can access a good education from nursery to higher and technical education. Improving access and improving quality: these are the two principles that underpin all educational reform initiatives, those that are already law and those that will become laws before the end of the government.*

*We want our sons and daughters, no matter where they live, to have real alternatives to receive preschool education, something essential to equate rights and open a world of new possibilities for them. All the evidence shows that the support and encouragement received during the first three years of life will mark their opportunities in the future.*

(Michelle Bachelet, Public Speech, 1<sup>st</sup>, May of 2016)

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Early Childhood Education in Chile: Quality at the Centre of the Discourse**

Educational reforms have been at the centre of Chilean social policies during the last decades. From the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, to the transition governments - including a major reform process that is taking place during the current government of Michelle Bachelet (2014-2018) – politicians and academics have placed education at the core of social reforms, developing specific discourses that reflect on the importance of education and which use Quality as a pivotal concept. At the same time, Early Childhood Education (hereinafter ECE) has been given greater emphasis both internationally and nationally during recent years. ECE has risen to prominence not simply in policy discourse, but also in academic work that emphasises the importance of early intervention in order to secure individual and social futures. Both international and national evidence claims that ‘investing’ in ECE is strategic because it can help reduce the inequality gap, particularly if those programs ensure Quality and Equity (For international evidence, see Cunha, Heckman, Lochner, & Masterov, 2005; Fox, Levitt, & Nelson, 2010. For national evidence see for example CEDEP, 2007, 2010; Contreras, Herrera, & Leyton, 2007). In this context, research regarding what might be described as the ‘childhood discourse’, looking at how children’s experiences and perspectives influence how Quality is defined, is relatively rare. Even though this concept is commonly used by politicians and academics, the ECE discourse and specifically the use of Quality in that discourse, remains diffuse and ambiguous (Adlerstein, 2012; Casassus, 2003). Much work on this area does not address complexities present in the construction of such discourses, and how they influence and are influenced by their socio-historic context. Similarly, even though there is vast research in Chile regarding educational policies implemented in the country during the last 30 years (Cox, 1997, 2005, 2012; Valenzuela, Labarrera, & Rodríguez, 2008) little of that research has focused on developing a critical analysis that questions the ‘official discourse’ in education, specifically in terms of Quality, and confronting the

hegemonic representations with local knowledge, drawing on a critical approach that questions such ideas and allows for real transformations in the system.

According to Chilean social scientist Juan Casassus (2003), Quality is typically invoked from an emotional and value-based perspective, becoming that 'something else' to achieve and remaining as such; a socially ambiguous concept. By contrast, measures of Quality of education and in ECE have been developed with very specific indicators, generally based on international measures that mostly focus on effectiveness and therefore, are linked to specific ideologies regarding what education is, and what its purposes are. Any definition of Quality inevitably reflects different ideological, political and social ideals and beliefs (Sayed, 1997). Thus, it needs to be critically analysed, understanding that specific social contexts may have different approaches to Quality. I argue that in such a critical analysis the voices of those who participate directly in the educational process must be incorporated into the discussion of how these concepts are defined. As Alexander (2008) stresses, most of the discussion (present in academic, political and policy-making fields) surrounding these concepts has been led by those who oversee the design of policies rather than by those who put them into practice, using sophisticated indicators that may not coincide with the views of key actors in education such as children, teachers and parents, and what they understand as Quality. For this reason, it is necessary to analyse the discourse of Quality in ECE from a critical perspective, highlighting the tensions and contradictions present in its definition, how it relates to the broader social context of Chile, how it maintains and reproduces the inequalities and power relations present in the country and how it also enables spaces of resistance within the preschool settings, and lastly how the discourse of key actors such as teachers and children play a significant role in the practice of ECE and in the construction of ECE spaces.

In this thesis, I aim at understanding how the 'official discourse' of Quality in ECE in Chile is represented by stakeholders and official documents, and how children's experiences of preschool relate (or not) to that 'official discourse', highlighting the tensions and commonalities present in both perspectives. By using a case study strategy with an ethnographical approach, I analyse these

perspectives from a critical standpoint, using a postcolonial and feminist approach that allows me to reflect on and question the contradictions present in the 'official discourse' relating to how Quality is defined and used to promote a specific discourse of education. Additionally, I reflect on how children's experiences influence and are influenced by the hegemonic discourse present in the country, acknowledging the complexity of the power relations established in ECE (both between children and adults, as well as between children as a social group and those who hold power). Through my analysis, I recognize tensions and commonalities between both perspectives, and how they influence the way in which the discourse of Quality is developed and put into practice in a public preschool setting in Chile. In this sense, through my representations of the 'official discourse' of Quality in ECE in Chile, and children's meaning making of their experience in preschool, I develop an in-depth understanding of how the concept of Quality is constructed, including local perspectives and knowledges that can question its definition, allowing for spaces of resistance to be developed in educational settings in the country.

## **1.2 Chilean Education and the Neoliberal Experiment: The Need to Question the Discourse of Quality**

One of the biggest reforms experienced during the last decades was inaugurated during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, in which a 'neoliberal experiment' was developed by a group of Chilean economists popularly known as the 'Chicago Boys' led by Milton Friedman (Clark & Clark, 2016; Klein, 2007). This experiment was based on a series of ideas that Friedman posed as necessary for the implementation of a neoliberal economic system. These included the liberalization of economy and reduced public expenditure in favour of increased market influence. In a neoliberal economic system, the private sector begins to perform a determinate role in the definition of public policies. The installation of this system rested on a series of systematic, rapid and extensive changes, facilitated by authoritarian rule (Harvey, 2005; Vergara, 2014a, 2014b). These included transformations in the economic, social and cultural spheres and involved a restructuring of the relations between those spheres (Fairclough,

2004; Vergara, 2014a). As I argue below, understanding how neoliberalism was established and developed in this context, not simply as an economic system but as a social discourse, is crucial to understanding subsequent developments in education, and ECE in particular.

### **1.2.1 Neoliberalism: Definition and Main features**

As a governing order, neoliberalism has risen to prominence based on a set of economic and political principles that promote strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. It is associated with a drive to give individuals greater entrepreneurial freedom, through which, it is assumed, they will make the most of their skills within a free market context (Harvey, 2005). Within this system, the State's role is to preserve and protect the institutional framework that allows for those practices to be implemented. This means both guaranteeing the integrity of money, securing private property rights and the proper functioning of markets, and the creation of new markets that did not previously exist (in areas such as land, water, education, and health care). Conversely, the State should always remain passive in terms of intervention in the economic system, "because it is assumed not to possess enough information and any interpretation of economic signals is best left in the hands of market forces" (Stromquist & Sanyal, 2013, p.153).

Neoliberalism is derived in part from liberal nineteenth century political theory arguing that free markets operate better without state intervention. In the late twentieth century, such ideas were modified and integrated in policies designed to radically overhaul (but not remove) state machinery that had been developed in the intervening period (Clark & Clark, 2016).

According to the work of David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism encompasses four main governing principles. Firstly, a reduction of governmental power to intervene in the economy which is achieved by promoting *privatization*, that is, selling public assets and contracting out services. Secondly, a tendency for corporations to pursue *commodification* of not only their products, but also of their services and workers to increase profit. Thirdly, a shift whereby governments increasingly

prioritize monetary policies over fiscal policies<sup>1</sup>, and diminish inflation by promoting *financialization*. And lastly, a focus of political leaders in potential economic or financial crises that can be used to push their particular agendas.

In addition to these four basic principles, Harvey (2005) proposes a series of additional features that define neoliberalism. Firstly, neoliberalism establishes *Freedom* as a pivotal value not only in terms of the economy, but in terms of its fundamental political importance. Specifically, neoliberalism incorporates the concept of freedom by affirming that individual freedom can only be guaranteed by encouraging the freedom of the market. Nevertheless, even though the discourse is explicit about the importance of securing individual freedom above all other values, in practice, several contradictions appear as the State can sometimes intervene in an undemocratic manner to guarantee the protection of the economic and financial system, disregarding as it does so, individual freedoms.

Secondly, Harvey (2005) describes the construction of consent, as a strategy built upon the idea of common sense, in which specific discourses can be promoted through the use of political slogans that appeal to cultural and moral values (for example, the use of the word freedom to promote neoliberal ideas). This positioning of values such as individual freedom as if they were common sense and indisputable, can have the effect of marginalising other values, such as social justice, solidarity, and multiculturalism. In this sense, even though the state is set to protect the freedom of its people, “in the event of a conflict between the integrity of financial institutions and bondholders’ returns, on the one hand, and the well-being of the citizens on the other, the former [tend to be] privileged” (Harvey, 2005, p. 48).

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<sup>1</sup> Monetary policies are defined as the management of interest rates and the circulation of money, mostly implemented by central banks. Fiscal policies refer to taxing and spending actions of governments (Harvey, 2005).



Thirdly, according to this presiding neoliberal 'common sense', the state should have a subsidiary role. The role of the State is nonetheless significant, even if it is fundamentally answerable to economic logic. It operates through the privatization of public resources, the deregulation of the economy and the promotion of competition between companies, cities, regions and individuals, seeking as it does so to increase the so-called efficiency of the economic system (Harvey, 2005). These interventions place 'individual responsibility' at the core of their activities. That is, "each individual should be held accountable for his or her own actions and well-being (...) Here, individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings" (p.65). There is a pervasive assumption that individuals will have access to the same information, and on that basis will be able to make rational economic decisions. However, in reality, power relations and inequalities present in the system do not allow for every individual to have access to the same information, and thus, the system reproduces inequalities, and continues to concentrate wealth by those in power. The key difference is that individual economic actors are now blamed as 'responsibilized subjects' for perpetuating their own misfortune. As David Harvey points out:

It is precisely in such a context of diminished personal resources derived from the job market that the neoliberal determination to transfer all responsibility for well-being back to the individual has doubly deleterious effects. As the state withdraws from welfare provision and diminishes its role in arenas such as health care, public education, and social services, which were once so fundamental to embedded liberalism, it leaves larger and larger segments of the population exposed to impoverishment. The social safety net is reduced to a bare minimum in favour of a system that emphasizes personal responsibility. Personal failure is generally attributed to personal failings, and the victim is all too often blamed. (Harvey, 2005, p.76)

To reiterate, by transferring responsibility to the individuals in the achievement of their priced (economic) freedom, and diminishing access to social services, the state perpetuates the inequalities present in the system through the use of the same strategies and practices that are supposedly aimed at promoting and increasing the efficiency of the economy, and guaranteeing the wellbeing of its citizens.

By analysing the main features of neoliberalism, it is possible to understand how this discourse has become hegemonic in its implementation, having major influence in the way society thinks and defines its core values. It would appear that neoliberalism has itself been established as part of the common sense, becoming 'the' way in which we explain and understand the world (Harvey, 2005). Additionally, neoliberalism as a global discourse was imposed through a series of experiments (the Chilean being one of the most important as it established the main ways in which a neoliberal system can be installed in a country) that was strengthened during the crisis of capital during the 1970's, mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom. As Harvey (2005) describes:

The uneven geographical development of neoliberalism, its frequently partial and lop-sided application from one state and social formation to another, testifies to the tentativeness of neoliberal solutions and the complex ways in which political forces, historical traditions, and existing institutional arrangements all shaped why and how the process of neoliberalization actually occurred. (p.13)

As Harvey argues, the complexity with which neoliberalism has been installed in the world varies greatly, and this variation has to do not only with the ways in which it was imposed, but also, with the previous history of the country in terms of the power relations established, and the manner in which economic and social elites participated in its implementation. For these reasons, it is important to understand how neoliberalism was implemented in Chile, and, for the purposes of this study, investigate the particular ways in which it affected the definition and design of educational policies in the country, particularly in ECE.

### ***1.2.2 The Neoliberal Experiment in Education: Quality at the centre***

When the dictatorship was established in Chile, a series of reforms were introduced with education as one of the primary foci. Specifically, the 'official discourse' established during the dictatorship focused on the importance of promoting Quality of education through a competitive system that enabled parents to choose schools for their children based on Quality standards, which at the same time were defined from a very specific ideology based on economic principles. However, even though a discourse of Quality was mobilised, it was connected to a political reality in which Municipalities were governed by people appointed by the dictatorship and where citizens were not included in the election

processes (Corbalán & Corbalán, 2012). At the same time, the new financing policy did not necessarily mean that parents could make an informed choice when enrolling their children into school. For example, the diversification of private-subsidized establishments benefited mainly urban areas, increasing segregation and leaving rural or less populated urban areas with fewer enrolment rates, and thus, less financing (Cox, 2005).

During the transition governments following the dictatorship (commonly defined as the 20 years in which 'Concertación', a centre-left alliance party ruled, from 1990 to 2010), politicians and policy makers focused on constructing a shared national project, with education at its core. Nevertheless, most of the initiatives started by the dictatorship (and designed with a clear neoliberal focus) were maintained and even fostered by the transition governments, reflecting tensions and contradictions in the discourse promoted by these initiatives (Beyer, 2001; Cox, 2005, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2008) where the concept of Quality appears as pivotal in its development. Furthermore, there appears to be a movement towards developing reforms that promote neoliberal principles such as decentralization and competition (Corbalán & Corbalán, 2012) establishing a discourse that is positioned as an 'objective' and 'universal' way of understanding education, obscuring its socially constructed nature.

During the second period of Michelle Bachelet's government (2014-2018), a series of reforms were designed and promoted (following another educational reform initiated during Bachelet's first period), aiming at developing a free and Quality educational system for all (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2014). However, for many researchers and critics of the neoliberal model, any structural reform to the educational system requires a process of questioning current definitions in terms of fundamental questions such as: What is education? How and why we are educating our children? How is public education defined? And what is Quality education? Even if the reform proposes a series of institutional transformations at the basis of the system, these main questions still remain unanswered (Miranda, 2014; Orellana, 2014).

As these concerns and critical questions indicate, it is necessary to develop a more critical approach to the analysis of ECE policies, focusing in particular on the ways in which certain concepts came to be located at the core of ECE policy design, and how (and by whom) they are defined and used to maintain and/or resist inequalities present in the broader social context. In relation to the latter, I am adopting a position that recognizes that specific social practices influence the way in which social structures are constructed and maintained, and that the manner in which particular concepts are presented and legitimized, affects the way in which society is built. Simultaneously, society influences how certain concepts are constructed, and social structures can mould social practices to fit the ideas embedded behind such structures.

To engage in a critical discussion of these issues, I use postcolonial and feminist theories. In general terms<sup>2</sup>, postcolonial theories aim at critiquing new forms of colonialism, challenging hegemonic discourses and ways of knowing (such as neoliberal and rationalistic thinking) acknowledging the complex nature of the relation between colonizers and colonized (Andreotti, 2011; Rizvi, Lingard, & Lavia, 2006; Tikly, 1999). Thus, the use of postcolonial theories allows me to analyse the complex relations between, in this case, the 'official discourse' of Quality in ECE, and children's perspectives on their preschool experience, highlighting their complexity through the recognition of tensions and commonalities, and how broader hegemonic discourses are embedded in both perspectives. Similarly, feminist theories, specifically those developed within a postcolonial perspective, aim to question the patriarchal notions embedded in the development of colonial and neo-colonial discourses, looking to incorporate the views of those who are oppressed, incorporating issues such as gender, race and class into the discussion. In this sense, decolonization entails the recognition of patriarchal and heteronormative discourses in society, and how such discourses are intimately related to neo-colonial and neoliberal ideologies (Deepak, 2011; Mohanty, 2006). Specifically, when talking about ECE, the patriarchal and neo-colonial discourse can be recognized in terms of how ECE has been defined as a 'feminine' field (and as such, associated with 'feminine'

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<sup>2</sup> Postcolonial and Feminist theories will be explained in detail in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

attributes that have been generally underestimated as valuable or relevant) (Davis, Krieg, & Smith, 2015). Here, children are also positioned as a disadvantaged group, in the sense that they are mostly described as 'incomplete' beings, needing to acquire a series of previously defined (by adults) set of skills to become 'mature' adults.

In the context of Chile, ECE policies have focused on the achievement of Quality goals, internationally designed by 'experts' in the field. However, there is still a lack of reflexive and critical studies in terms of how the concept of Quality is defined and by whom. Thus, analysing how the concept is constructed by the 'official discourse', and how it relates (or not) to how children make meaning of their experiences in preschool, allows me to criticize the use of Quality as a pivotal concept in the design of ECE policies, incorporating local knowledge from the perspective of key actors involved in the practice of ECE, that is, children.

### **1.3 Research Aims and Questions**

Researching children's experiences of preschool has gained relevance during the last years, especially in terms of developing participatory techniques to include children's voices, positioning them as an active social group that is influenced and can influence social discourses. However, in Chile there is still a lack of research that incorporates children's perspectives, much less with a critical standpoint. Similarly, and as I pointed out at the beginning of this Chapter, this research focused on the reflection and questioning of current hegemonic discourses embedded in educational policies is still emergent in the country. Thus, drawing from these issues, the main question of my research study is as follows:

a) Main Question

*What are the conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile present in the official discourse of stakeholders, and how do these conceptualisations influence and are influenced by the conceptualisations given by children participating in an ECE classroom in relation to their preschool experience?*

b) Complementary Questions

1. How is the official discourse of Quality in ECE in Chile constructed by stakeholders and relevant documents?
2. How do children in this study construct meaning in relation to their ECE experience in a public Chilean preschool?
3. What are the commonalities, differences and tensions present in the conceptualisations of Quality constructed by the 'official discourse', and how children construct meaning in relation to their ECE experience?

My research focuses on understanding the conceptualisation of Quality in ECE in the 'official discourse', and how children in this study conceptualize their preschool experiences. Specifically, I aim to analyse how the relation between both perspectives can reflect tensions and commonalities present in wider hegemonic discourses, contributing to the construction and reproduction of inequalities present in Chile.

## 1.4 Thesis Structure

To answer my research questions, this thesis is organized in 5 parts with a series of Chapters constituting each part. **Part I** focuses on the context of the research, where **Chapter 2** provides the general context of the Chilean educational system and ECE in particular, describing the main historical and social changes related to education in the country, and their relation to broader hegemonic discourses, through the implementation of neoliberal initiatives. Following this, **Chapter 3** focuses on the different conceptualisation of Quality in education, and in ECE, as well as its problematization at an international level, as well as within the Chilean

educational context.

**Part II** of this thesis aims at describing the theoretical framework my research is based on. Here, Chapter 4 describes postcolonial and feminist theories, their main ideas and exponents, as well as how they relate to discussions of the discourse of Quality, allowing for the questioning of hegemonic discourses in ECE.

**Part III** of this thesis focuses on the research design, where **Chapter 5** describes in detail my epistemological stance in terms of the methodological design, that is, an interpretive and critical approach to social research. Additionally, it discusses the research questions and justifies the selection of methods and strategies in the research design. Lastly, this Chapter describes my *positionality*<sup>3</sup> within this study, and the ethical implications and concerns raised throughout the research process, reflecting on the challenges and lessons learned, as well as critically analysing my position as a researcher.

**Part IV** is constituted by the empirical Chapters of this thesis. Firstly, **Chapter 6** describes the analysis and main findings of the conceptualisation of Quality in ECE by the 'official discourse' in Chile, answering research question 1. **Chapter 7** describes the main findings from analysing children's perspectives on their preschool experience (research question 2), focusing on how children construct meaning, and how they interact with others to construct it. **Chapter 8** focuses on research question 3, developing an in-depth analysis of the tensions and commonalities between both perspectives previously analysed, and how these tensions reflect wider hegemonic discourses such as neoliberal and patriarchal notions in education, and the whole system.

Finally, **Part V** of this thesis discusses the main conclusions of my study. **Chapter 9** summarises and reflects on the main research findings of this study. Specifically, I discuss the implications of the discourse of Quality in ECE in Chile and how it is reflected in children's meaning making of their preschool

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of positionality will be defined in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

experiences. I also explore the empirical and theoretical contributions of this thesis to the understanding of the concept of Quality in ECE, and how children's perspectives can be included in critical discussions regarding the aims of education and its relation to the broader social system. Lastly, I discuss possibilities of developing spaces for transformation within preschool classrooms, acknowledging the complex relations embedded in such settings, and how these spaces of resistance can allow for the questioning and challenging of the inequalities present in the system.



## **Chapter 2. Educational Policies in Chile and the Establishment of a Neoliberal System: A history of tensions and continuities**

### **2.1 Introduction.**

Before analysing and critiquing the ways in which ECE policies have been designed, and how the concept of Quality has come to be at the centre of their development, it is necessary first to understand the socio-historical context in which such policies are embedded. Educational policies developed during the last 50 years have been designed in response to particular political contexts that have shaped how these policies are thought of, designed and implemented. Thus, it is relevant to describe that context in order to understand how the instalment of a neoliberal system in the country operated. I will argue that it has acted as a form of neo-colonialism, producing and maintaining the inequalities present in the country. I will argue, furthermore, that education and ECE in particular became the main site where the neoliberal system was produced and is still maintained as a governing social order.

In this Chapter, I will firstly describe the context in which Chile became an independent nation, and this set the foundations of the political and economic context in which educational polices were designed in the country. I will focus on how they were positioned within the social changes occurring in the country since it became an independent nation freed from the rule of the Hispanic Monarchy. Secondly, I will describe how both the general socio-political and educational system of Chile was established, and the major changes experienced during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, specifically during the Unidad Popular government, and the dictatorship that followed. In particular, I will describe the educational reforms developed during Salvador Allende's presidency (1970-1973), and how the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet established in 1973, dismantled and reorganized the system, implementing reforms that are still in force today. This occurred through the imposition of a neoliberal model, with the dictatorship defining both its main features as well as the specific way in which it would affect the socio-political and economic scene of Chile. Lastly, I will describe

the educational reforms implemented after the return of democracy, analysing how they reflect the tensions and contradictions present in the system today, where policies attempting to contest the ones developed during the dictatorship, not only perpetuate the basis of neoliberalism established before, but reinforce it through a series of initiatives that are constructed from the Quality discourse. Lastly, I will describe the history of ECE in Chile, and how its development relates to the broader educational system, reflecting on the tensions and contradictions present in this particular educational stage.

## **2.2 Transition from the Construction of an Independent Nation to the Rise of the Economic State.**

Chile was colonized by the Spanish crown from 1598 to 1810, when it gained its independence (Clark & Clark, 2016). The system developed by Spain during colonial times still resonates within the country, reflected in the political, social and economic structures that still remain. As Clark & Clark (2016) describe, during the colonial times, Spain developed a sort of “Hispanic Capitalism” in which certain economic areas were predominantly exploited (mining and plantation agriculture), and thus, economic monopolies appeared and wielded their power to accumulate wealth, maintained by an authoritarian and centralized government. The current political and economic system of Chile is still characterized by a strong presidential system and centralized government that is often given emergency power in an undemocratic manner, and by an economic power concentrated in mining and agriculture, controlled by landowners and foreign investors.

As for the social and economic elites, the exclusive groups that took control of the country and were responsible for building a new nation after the independence process, were in good part, a social extension of the aristocratic structure that was established during colonial times (Concha, 2014). Thus, it appears as though the inequalities still present in the country, are an extension of policies established during colonization. Indeed, power remains concentrated in a privileged few, where, as Loveman suggests: “The Spanish crown might lose

its dominions in America, but Chile would retain the indelible markings of Hispanic capitalism” (2001, p. 97). For this reason, an analysis of the social, and specifically the educational system in Chile, has to take into account the inequalities established during the colonization process.

### ***2.2.1 Constructing an educational system for the new nation***

Chile’s educational system was constructed upon the idea of building a nation after the independence process (1810-1818), and was used as a powerful tool to disseminate the ‘new nation’s’ values (Acevedo, 2006; Tedesco, 2012). Before the independence process, written culture had been unequally extended, and after emancipation from the Hispanic Monarchy, republican education had a political focus, making possible the development of political opinions and practices for the nation (Serrano, Ponce de León, & Rengifo, 2012a). In this new climate, education was imbued with a moral mission, to form citizens’ virtue with a focus on general interests rather than singular ones, in effect moulding the national character.

The construction of the new educational system involved mainly two strategies: firstly, the universalization of primary education, and secondly, the strengthening of secondary and higher education. These measures were implemented not only in Chile but in most of Latin America as countries were emancipated from the Hispanic Monarchy, using the educational setting as a space that enabled the foundation of a national identity, seeking social cohesion and political stability amongst Chilean citizens (Cox & Gysling, 2009; Elacqua, 2013; Tedesco, 2012). In accordance to these ideas, in 1833 a new constitution was signed and in it, freedom of teaching was stated as a fundamental pillar of education, along with a strong state responsibility in developing and supervising national education.

In terms of the strengthening of secondary and higher education, in 1842 the first public university called ‘Universidad de Chile’ was created on the basis of the established, private ‘University of San Felipe’. Its main focus was to supervise the establishment of the new national educational system. That same year, the first ‘Normal School’ was founded for the preparation of teachers, and shortly after,

an 'Arts and Crafts School' and a 'Fine Arts Conservatory' (Beyer, 2001; Labarca, 1939). This process was led by figures like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, an Argentine political exile living in Chile who was sent by the Chilean government to Europe and the United States, to investigate the educational models that countries in these regions established at the beginning of their capitalist development processes (Serrano et al., 2012a; Tedesco, 2012). In this sense, the aim of political leaders at that time was to copy the initiatives of these countries and transfer them into the national model. In a similar way, Andrés Bello - a Venezuelan-Chilean philosopher, educator and politician who greatly influenced policy in Chile - advocated that higher education should be a place for elites to be formed in order to become the new political leaders, and also worked in the strengthening of the new educational model (Tedesco, 2012). In this sense, the educational system in Chile rested on the idea in its design that Western culture and what later became known as the 'First world' were superior in terms of 'development', and thus, their systems needed to be imported into the country. It becomes clear then, that Chile built its national education system under the cloud of its colonial past, identifying other countries' culture as being more advanced, and identifying itself as the Other, even after the independence process.

One of the main features of this period was the limited capacity to include the entire population in the circuits of social participation, mainly because the socialization of values relating to national unity that were transmitted through education, were only assumed by those 'Illustrated', that is, the economic and political elite (Acevedo, 2006; Beyer, 2001; Serrano et al., 2012a; Tedesco, 2012). Those who were in positions of power in Chile had the opportunity to access education preferentially, as there was still no law that ensured universal access to primary and secondary education. Thus, the values of the 'new nation' were both constructed as well as incorporated mainly by the elite. In this sense, as well as with other Latin American countries that organized their nations after their independence processes, the Republic of Chile was constructed in the image of the 'developed' countries, where the elite was formed by those who had access to these cultures and supported the values and ideologies being developed in them.

During the next few decades, significant changes were implemented in the political field, such as the creation of political parties to govern the country which produced new sets of conflicts and disputes, with the educational system at the core of such conflicts (Serrano, Ponce de León, & Rengifo, 2012b). In 1920, the Mandatory Primary Education Law was promulgated, with the State assuming the responsibility of delivering education to every child in the country for at least the first four years (1<sup>st</sup> grade to 4<sup>th</sup> grade). This was an important statement at the time and became a symbol of the demands for social justice being discussed in parliament. Shortly after that, in 1925 a new Constitution was enacted, establishing the separation between State and Church, and declaring the State as the main 'protector' and supplier of education (Nuñez, 1997). With this change, primary education acquired a constitutional status as a right or universal entitlement strengthening the notion that education was a State responsibility and a social tool to transform the country.

By the end of 1920's, the public educational system was reorganized and the Ministry of Education was created (Nuñez, 1997). This period was characterized by a growing enrolment rate especially in primary education, and a focus on pedagogic and curricular aspects of education, incorporating scientific knowledge in the curriculum to promote economic growth, and democratic/social processes. Thus, the values and beliefs underlying the reforms implemented during this period were largely in sync with what is understood as the 'First World', as the industrial revolution was at its peak, and rationalistic and scientific thinking was at the centre of educational and economic policies. During this period enrolment rates in all of the educational cycles increased, including higher and adult education. However, the great depression of 1929-1939 affected Chile's economy just like in most countries around the world, and the president of that period, Pedro Aguirre Cerda, decided to implement a policy called 'New School' (Escuela Nueva), which intended to strengthen public education in a period of crisis by giving education the role of forming a new working force that would allow Chilean society to survive the economic crisis and achieve social justice (Henriquez, 1945). Further, it was argued that education should be free, secular and compulsory for all children.

In terms of higher education, the consistent growth of its institutions can be observed between 1920 and 1950, both in its public and private forms, expanding throughout the country and diversifying their academic offer, including new faculties, diverse careers, and research and specialization centres. In this context, resources destined for education started to be conceptualized as investment instead of expenditure, and major efforts were injected into the modernization of education and linking it to economic growth (Tedesco, 2012). This new paradigmatic view of education was supported by the increasing appearance of international organisations and United Nations agencies in Latin America, that played an important part in the implementation of the articulation between education and economic and social planning (Tedesco, 2012). Likewise, this new alliance allowed Chile to get connected with other countries and provided legitimacy to the modernization strategies that were being installed in the country. Similarly, it reinforced neo-colonial ideologies where 'First World' countries appeared as more 'developed', and where these same nations defined and constructed the guidelines by which other countries were measured.

Lastly, in 1965 president Eduardo Frei Montalva started a process of educational reform that modified educational plans and programs for teaching (Cox, 1986). Similarly, secondary education also suffered changes in its curricular programs, introducing technological approaches, new assessment methods with the creation of a national standardized test at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, as well as new textbooks and teaching materials. In addition, in 1967 the Centre for Training, Experimentation and Pedagogical Research was created, a Ministry of Education organisation that would promote massive training for teachers, with the aim of enabling teachers to participate in the curricular changes instituted.

## **2.3 Popular Unity Government and the Military Coup: The Dismantling of the State and the Neoliberal Experiment.**

### ***2.3.1 The rise of the socialist movement and the Chicago Boys***

During the 1950s and 1960s, a growing conflict between the middle class bureaucrats and the labour forces was in place, due to the lack of state resources to promote economic growth, and the self-serving strategies implemented by those in power to maintain their wealth, perpetuating imperialist practices and ideologies (Clark & Clark, 2016; Llanos, 2014). As a by-product of the implementation of agrarian reform in 1962, the current social order was questioned, and the families that originally controlled the land and production began to feel threatened by the socialist movement (Llanos, 2014). In particular, during this movement, civil society was no longer obeying the State, rather it was focused on, as Salazar and Pinto put it (1999), judging the hegemonic social order, which resulted in a growing intervention from the State by developing public policies in health, education and welfare (Llanos, 2014). In this sense, an important sector of political leaders agreed with the civil society on the idea that imperialism was still in place in Chile, and thus, in order to achieve 'true' independence, there needed to be drastic social and structural transformations. One could argue that there was an accompanying transition to the idea that change could be achieved on the streets, and not just through political leaders.

People began organizing leftist groups at factories, neighbourhoods, military barracks, school and university classrooms, among others. As a response, the Chilean state tried to "establish control over the growing class conflict" (Clark & Clark, 2016, p. 87), through the use of excessive force, repression and censorship. Likewise, new workers began organizing into labour unions and political parties and exercising pressure on the government. This movement undoubtedly frightened the elites, and they began building a sort of 'internal border' where they labelled socialists and communists as 'enemies of the State' (Llanos, 2014).

During this time, a group of Chilean students, most of them coming from the Pontificia Universidad Católica, one of the most prestigious universities in the country, travelled to the United States, as part of a study program designed by the School of Economy at the University of Chicago with the objective of training Chilean economists in the ideas of neoliberalism (Klein, 2007). This program was financed by the University and it was especially designed to overthrow the rise of socialist ideas in Latin America. Arnold Harberger was in charge of welcoming the Chilean students, where he created a special workshop in which the university's teachers presented an ideologically driven diagnosis of the Chilean economic crisis, and offered specific strategies to approach it.

The students who participated in the program were known as the 'Chicago Boys', and became local ambassadors of the ideas of neoliberalism in Latin America. As Klein (2007) describes, the School of Chicago implemented the transfer of the neoliberal ideology into a country in which the United States had direct influence, thereby exercising a new form of intellectual imperialism through the education of economists belonging to the elite groups in Chile.

### ***2.3.2 Chile's Democratic Road to Socialism: The Unidad Popular Program***

As a result of the organization from leftist parties, in 1970, Salvador Allende was elected president as the leader of the Unidad Popular, in the first democratically elected socialist presidency in the world. Salvador Allende proposed a series of reforms organized under the idea of putting back into the government's hands, great sectors of the economy, especially those run by private enterprises and 'foreigners' (Klein, 2007). In particular, as Clark & Clark (2016) describe it:

The Chilean Senate declared him President on October 24 (Cockcroft, 2000). However, the Senate put new limits on his presidency. Through constitutional reform Allende's presidential powers were severely limited, thus preventing his government from promoting policies or creating directives that related to education, individual freedoms, and religion. Moreover, Allende had limited power over security forces and in appointing commanding officers of the military. Furthermore, he was not allowed to appoint members of his political party to state administrative positions. (p.88-89).



Nonetheless, despite the opposition coming from different institutions within the country, Allende attempted to implement a series of reforms organized through his idea of “Chile’s democratic road to socialism”. Specifically, he focused on nationalizing resources and designing a stronger welfare system for the working class.

In general terms, Allende’s government program consisted a series of initiatives and reforms, attempting to construct a ‘Popular State’ and a planned and nationalized economy (Harvey, 2005). It set out to implement a series of control mechanisms to protect economic growth and guarantee jobs for the working people. Through these reforms, the government aimed at constructing a new way for the state to understand and recognize human dignity, especially in terms of a citizen’s involvement in the workforce, positioning workers at the centre of the development process. As one of its main reforms, Allende “confiscated and redistributed the Chilean estates to individual landless families. It nationalized the copper industry, purchased almost all of Chile’s banks, and nationalized a broad array of industrial concerns” (Clark & Clark, 2016, p.30).

In terms of education, and notwithstanding the limitations that had been imposed upon him, Salvador Allende focused his government’s educational initiatives on bringing education to all children increasing the enrolment rates, and democratizing the educational offer and management of the system. Allende approached this not by attempting a new educational reform but by continuing the one started by the previous government. During this period, both constitutional norms as well as social consensus agreed in assigning the State an important role in education. Here it nonetheless emphasized the importance of maintaining freedom of teaching and giving space to private initiatives in the educational offer, whilst having as its main focus the democratization of education, with a view to strengthening principles and values of a socialist society (Nuñez, 1997; Valenzuela et al., 2008).

At the core of the educational policies of Allende was the National Unified School, ENU (Escuela Nacional Unificada for its initials in Spanish). This initiative was violently contested by the detractors of the communist government when it was debated in congress. It aimed to work towards equality of opportunity through the incorporation of every child and young person into the national education system, and promote democratic participation of educational workers and the community in its transformation (Oliva, 2010). Further, the ENU proposed a National System of Permanent Education which would comprise the education of every individual throughout his life, embedded in society and actively participating in the revolutionary process.

When the president of the United States, Richard Nixon, found out that Allende was the new president of Chile, he gave a direct order to the CIA in which he asked them to make the Chilean economy 'scream' (Klein, 2007). As Klein describes:

Although Allende promised to negotiate fair compensation to counterweigh companies that lost property and investments, US multinationals feared that Allende would represent the beginning of a general trend throughout Latin America, and many were not willing to accept losing resources that had become an important portion of its benefits. (2007, p. 104)

As a consequence of the economic isolation executed by the United states, the deterioration of prices of exports (especially copper, Chile's main export), and the threat of bankruptcy, Allende's program began to collapse (Clark & Clark, 2016). Thus, business elites and foreign investors began pressuring the government and questioning Allende's authority. Similarly, radical left groups who did not agree with Allende's idea of a peaceful and democratic road to socialism, began seizing factories and business, further alienating the government from the middle class groups that had once supported it. Likewise, the 'Chicago Boys' also reacted to the elections, describing the events as a 'tragedy' that had to be dealt with as soon as possible.

In 1973, Allende attempted to form an alliance with the right, by appointing Pinochet as commander-in-chief of the army. Additionally, he approved the removal of workers who occupied several factories, and agreed to hold a plebiscite, giving the people the opportunity to end his presidency. However, Pinochet feared Allende would win the election, and thus, he and the rest of the heads of the military, along with political and business elites (and the direct influence of the Chicago Boys), he staged a military coup d'état on September 11<sup>th</sup> of 1973 (Clark & Clark, 2016).

### ***2.3.3 The Dismantling of the Unidad Popular Program, and the establishment of neoliberal policies***

According to Melanie Klein (2007), when the dictatorship was enforced in Chile, a shock doctrine was established in the country. By shock doctrine, she refers to a series of neoliberal ideologies, strategies and practices installed in a country by taking advantage of the use of force, caution and crisis (whether natural, political or social). In Chile, neoliberalism was imposed through the use of three different forms of 'shock', namely: the shock of the coup d'état in itself; a capitalist shock that resulted in a series of economic reforms to install the neoliberal system; and the shock of sensory deprivation, repression and torture regarding anyone who advocated ideas opposed to neoliberalism (Klein, 2007; Llano, 2014).

The new neoliberal model installed by the military regime was not just an economic program, but also a set of specific values and ideas regarding culture and society that promoted free choice, individualistic ethics, legitimizing public services as commodities, and reconceptualising the role of the State as a subsidiary agency (Clark & Clark, 2016). As far as general measures and reforms went, Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship repressed leftist social movements and political organizations, and began a series of reforms that allowed the labour market to be freed from regulatory restraints (such as reducing trade union power and allowing for foreign companies to invest in Chile (Harvey 2005). Moreover, the dictatorship expanded the idea of the free market and the subsidiary State to public services such as education, health, welfare and housing, turning them into new commodities (Concha, 2014). Specifically, the 'Chicago Boys':

Reversed the nationalizations and privatized public assets, opened up natural resources (fisheries, timber, etc.) to private and unregulated exploitation (in many cases riding roughshod over the claims of indigenous inhabitants), privatized social security, and facilitated foreign direct investment and freer trade. The right of foreign companies to repatriate profits from their Chilean operations was guaranteed. Export-led growth was favoured over import substitution. The only sector reserved for the state was the key resource of copper. (Harvey, 2005, p.7-8)

These measures proved useful for the accumulation of wealth of the ruling elites, but mostly, what these reforms promoted was the further redistribution of wealth (that became even more concentrated in a very small number of families, most of them belonging to the upper class and aristocracy established during colonial times) and further increasing social inequality. In a very basic sense, neoliberalism was installed as a way to “reinforce the economic position of the traditional economic elites” (Clark & Clark, 2016, p.3).

With regard to education, the arrival of the civic-military dictatorship brought an abrupt and substantial decline of investment in education, reducing from 7.5% of the gross domestic product, to a mere 2.6% (Stromquist & Sanyal, 2013 p. 153). Specifically, the educational reforms initiated by the civic-military dictatorship at the beginning of the 1980's were focused on three main aspects: Firstly, the transfer of all educational institutions from the management of the Ministry of Education to the 325 municipal councils in the country at the time. This gave the municipalities the power to hire and fire personnel (teachers, head teachers, teaching assistants, administrative personnel, among others), and to manage infrastructure as well as economic funds, leaving the Ministry of Education solely with curricular, evaluation and supervision functions (Cox, 2012). Secondly, the way resources were allocated was radically changed, implementing a modality based on the payment of school vouchers for each student attending schools<sup>4</sup>. This strategy aimed to promote private investments in the creation of primary and secondary schools, becoming one of the most radical school systems in terms of market regulation, giving way to the privatization of the academic offer and

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<sup>4</sup> This system was inspired by the ideas of Milton Friedman, basing payment according to enrolment rates and channelling resources through administrators (public and private). This was one of the few voucher systems established in the world, and is the only one still functioning at a national level (Valenzuela et al., 2008)

strengthening ideological control of the content taught in schools (Tedesco, 2012). Thirdly, the teachers' labour market and initial training was abruptly modified, because teachers lost their status as public employees, with their salaries being determined by individual employers (whether public or private). Similarly, as the financing system shifted to the use of vouchers, public investment diminished greatly and this cost was absorbed by the teachers, with municipal teachers working in low income contexts being the most affected (Cox, 2005, 2012).

These initiatives had the ostensible aim of increasing efficiency in the use of resources through competition of enrolment rates between institutions. They transferred management functions to the local governments (process of "municipalization") by reducing the State's influence in their administration, diminishing negotiation power of teachers' unions, increasing private investment in education provision, and bringing secondary education closer to the economic aspects of services and production enterprises (Cornejo, 2006; Cox, 1986; Nuñez, 1997).

In terms of higher education, a major change was made when the mechanism that established the creation of universities by law decrees was eliminated. By doing this, the government gave large incentives for the creation of new universities, higher education institutes and technical training centres. At the same time, state universities were reduced to the faculties located in the capital, and those that were in other cities were transformed into new public universities, commonly called 'derived'. Thus, the higher education system increased from 8 universities in 1973, to 68 universities, 73 professional institutes and 127 technical centres by the year 1995 (Nuñez, 1997; Oliva, 2010).

Regarding aspects of curriculum and evaluation, in 1983 an evaluation program for school performance (PER – Programa de Evaluación de Rendimiento Escolar for its initials in Spanish) was created. It consisted of a system of national standardized tests applied in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade (primary school). This program was suspended after three years of implementation, and in 1988 SIMCE (Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación for its initials in Spanish) was created,

becoming the most important tool currently used to assess Quality of education in Chile (Cox, 2012; Nuñez, 1997).

Lastly, in terms of legal reforms, the military dictatorship established a new general law of education called Organic Constitutional Law to Teaching (LOCE- Ley Orgánica Constitucional sobre Enseñanza for its initials in Spanish), that established the minimum standard criteria for each level of teaching, allowing the state to supervise and evaluate its functioning. This law was dictated in March of 1990 (during the last days of the dictatorship), and became the landmark of the neoliberal mechanisms that regulated the educational system (Oliva, 2010).

In essence, the civic-military dictatorship imposed for 17 years, implemented a series of reforms in education that helped cement a neoliberal system, in what was called one of the biggest neoliberal 'experiments' in the world (Oliva, 2010). Thus, the educational system was transformed entirely, moving from being a 'public good' to a 'consumer good', and moulding its curriculum according to the basis of 'human capital' theory, where the focus is put in technical knowledge and the development of an 'objective centred' pedagogy (Moreno-Doña & Gamboa, 2014).

Even though the development of reforms and initiatives that supported and maintained the dependence of Chile from more powerful nations has been present since its formal independence from Spain, the period of the dictatorship is considered the most extreme and radical as it established policies and laws that fostered the development of a neoliberal system overall, and secured this development with the promulgation of organic laws as well as explicit forms of repression and censorship. In this sense, the implementation of these reforms perpetuated the social inequalities present in the country, and helped prolong a neo-colonial structure where the values and beliefs promoted by 'First World' nations, centred around rationalistic and objectivistic thinking, repressing and diminishing local and contextual knowledge in favour of fomenting 'human capital' skills.

## **2.4 Transition to ‘Democracy’ and the Quality Discourse**

During the transition governments following the dictatorship, the main concern for politicians and policy makers was to create a shared national project that enabled the reconstruction of the Chilean identity after a period of authoritarian rule. This project had the educational system at its core, not only because education was an area where politicians from all parties were in consensus (at least at a formal level) regarding its relevance, but also because the modernization process that was being experienced internationally was said to require new knowledge and skills (Cox, 1997, 2005). Thus, one of the major concerns was to contrast their policies to those implemented during the dictatorship.

Specifically, the educational policies implemented between 1990 and 2000 were mainly focused on Quality issues and equity of educational and learning opportunities in the school system. These initiatives were said to differentiate themselves to the ones executed in previous years because they prioritized public resources in education and executed policies that were focused in areas that had been excluded in the past; they defined Quality outcomes which were absent in educational policies during the dictatorship; and they valued public education and a state capable not only of assuring minimal conditions for education, but also of defining and implementing policies focused on the development of education as a whole (Cox, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2008).

The process of reform established during this period was intended to move away from those reforms implemented during the dictatorship, while at the same time ensuring their approval through the promotion of agreement amongst all areas involved in education. Thus, President Aylwin (first democratically elected president since the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet) summoned the National Commission for Education Modernization in 1994, with the purpose of systematizing and helping to bring consensus between the political, economic and educational leaders as to what were the main needs and challenges in the sector (Cox, 2012). Particularly, the reform of 1990 established during the government of Patricio Aylwin focused on Quality, defined as a measure of

students' capability for abstract and integral thinking, communication skills, team work, rational judgment and moral discernment that allows them to function in a complex world (Cox, 2012). This focus on Quality is the main feature of the educational reforms experienced with the return of democracy not only in Chile but in all Latin American countries (Tedesco, 2012).

As the focus of the reforms was specifically located in promoting Quality and Equity goals, 10 programs were implemented during this period, that is: 2 universal programs whose aim was to create and/or strengthen capacities and processes in primary and secondary schools (MECE-Básica and MECE-Media); 4 focused programs whose aim was to strengthen vulnerable and low results schools (P-900, Rural Education Program, "Montegrando Program", and "School for Everyone Program"); 3 programs focused on professional development for teachers ("Initial Training Strengthening Program", "Perfecting Program for the Implementation of the Curricular Reform", "Foreign Teaching Internships Program"); and 1 program specialized in the implementation of educational ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) in the entire school system ("Enlaces Program"). Along with this, other reforms were implemented such as the change of the school schedule to a full school day in 1997, and the curriculum change initiated in 1996. At the same time, research in education began to proliferate largely across the country as well as the incorporation of comparative international evidence and consultation processes in the community (Cox, 2005).

In relation to the other reforms implemented during the dictatorship, the transitional government decided not to revert the municipalization process or change the financing mechanism established in 1981. Further, they promoted the perfecting of the new national system of evaluation and used its results to design compensatory programs for 'low performing' establishments. On the other hand, one of the major signs of differentiation from the previous reforms, was that the state was re-situated as the main agency responsible for bringing education to all children, which was reflected in the increase in public expenditure, and the redefinition of the teaching profession. But most importantly, the transitional government set as their main objective the accomplishment of Quality goals and equity in education redefining the role of the state from a subsidiary to a promoter



and responsible state (Cox, 2005). Additionally, there was an important increase in public expenditure, as well as the inclusion of other forms of investment such as shared financing which allowed schools to charge a certain amount to parents while still receiving the voucher delivered by the state, and also allowing donations to be made for educational purposes (Cox, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2008).

Even though there was some interest in locating educational reforms at the core of social change, most of the initiatives started by the dictatorship (and designed with a focus on market oriented strategies) were maintained and even potentiated by the transition governments. Thus, authors like Cox, Valenzuela and Beyer agree on the fact that keeping a decentralized model of education (administered by local governments) based on market incentives (via the delivery of vouchers for private administrators) was a 'flagrant contradiction' with the new image they were trying to portray of an educational system centred around the principles of Quality and equity for all (Beyer, 2001; Cox, 2005, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2008).

While initiatives focused on improving Quality in education were being implemented (especially in vulnerable settings), the teaching profession was still managed by market conditions. Similarly, vouchers were still being delivered to private administrators based on a logic of supply and demand, and learning outcomes were still being used to promote competition between schools. As Valenzuela, Labarrera and Rodríguez in their analysis of the tensions and continuities present in the Chilean educational system describe:

Educational policies are in constant transformation, often unarticulated, trying to find an alternative that balances the needs of the free market-continuity of a macroeconomic model based on its principles -, and the so long awaited equity-break from the neoliberal structure -, for a society that fails to access the benefits of a developing state (Valenzuela et al., 2008, p. 145).

As these authors argue, policies were designed in opposition to the ones developed during the dictatorship, while at the same time maintaining many of its achievements, thus facilitating a high degree of continuity through change. In relation to this specific issue, a number of researchers have focused on the analysis of tensions and continuities present in the Chilean educational system (Beyer, 2001; Corbalán & Corbalán, 2012; Cornejo, 2006; Valenzuela et al., 2008), but little has been done in terms of how and by whom the concept of Quality has been defined, and how it influences and is influenced by the policy design.

## **2.5 Early Childhood Education in Chile: Transiting Between Ideas of Care and Education.**

The institutional care of young children in Chile existed even before independence in 1818, mainly supported by charity institutions that focused their actions on partial care and protection (Peralta & Fujimoto, 1998). Similarly, education for young children also began early but was reduced to specific contexts, driven by a group of visionaries who advocated for the importance of this educational stage, through a process that also involved a series of political agreements and disagreements between local and European approaches to education and pedagogical work (described later in this section) (Adlerstein, 2012). Thus, understanding the development of ECE in Chile in relation to the broader educational and socio-historical context is relevant as it allows for a deeper analysis of how ECE is positioned today at the centre of educational reforms, and how the concept of Quality embodies the dominant discourse present in the country, that is, a neoliberal discourse of education and society.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the educational influences that were brought from Europe and the United States also included early childhood initiatives. Additionally, the first 'Playgroups' and 'Kindergartens' were established in the private sector, following the influence of what came to be known as the 'First World' (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001). Not long after, the first public 'Kindergarten' was created in 1906, as an annex to the 'Escuela

Normal N°1' (Secondary schools that trained students to become teachers) and Leopoldina Mauschkka, an Austrian children's rights promoter, was hired and brought from Austria to manage the establishment, implementing the Froebelian method with the help of students from the 'Escuela Normal'. Thus, just as with primary, secondary and higher education, ECE was also highly influenced by knowledge produced in what were considered more advanced and developed countries, maintaining the dependence of Chile on more powerful nations.

The establishment of the first 'Kindergarten' became important not only in terms of providing ECE services, but also in the development of ECE policies in Chile (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001). Similarly, Mauschkka also had a big influence in developing ECE policies, as well as with expanding ECE services. In 1911, she founded the first 'Popular Kindergarten' and began introducing local content into the pedagogical planning. During the next few years, ECE was extended throughout the country with establishments mainly annexed to 'Escuelas Normales'. Nevertheless, most of these initiatives focused on poor and/or rural communities (it was argued that wealthy families had the means to educate their children in their own homes), having very little coverage in its first years of implementation (UNESCO, 2010).

The education of young children and the policies designed for its development were mainly influenced by two groups of social actors, that is: the political and educational leaders inserted in high positions in the Ministry of Education that were grouped in the National Kindergarten Association; and the Union movement grouped in 'General Teachers Association', the 'Kindergarterinas Association' and the 'Preschool Red Cross Teachers' (Adlerstein, 2012). The first group followed the scientific and rationalistic principles promoted by 'developed' countries, and designed initiatives that they implemented at a small scale and then amplified to the rest of the preschool establishments. The second group constituted by the Unions, believed in a pedagogy based on creativity and liberty of action inside the classrooms, centred around autonomous and collective communities. In this sense, tensions between how ECE should be defined and what aspects it should promote were present since the beginning of ECE in Chile.

After the establishment of the first Kindergartens as well as initial training institutions for 'kindergarterinas', the consolidation of ECE as a formal educational stage began. The main purpose was to leave behind ideas of ECE as a form of care or as preparation for primary school (which resulted in a reduced focus on children between 4 and 6 years old, instead of the whole age spectrum<sup>5</sup>) (Peralta, 2003). Nevertheless, the creation of the School of Preschool/Nursery Education within the University of Chile in 1944, helped attribute to ECE a new and more important status, as it established it as an independent educational stage, and not just as nursery space. Additionally, it allowed for the expansion of ECE coverage across the country, and it helped systematize the type of pedagogical practices being used in different institutions such as the Montessori approach, the Drecolian, and the Froebelian method (Adlerstein, 2012; Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001; Peralta, 2003). At the same time, a number of nurseries were created mainly due to the incorporation of women to the work force, and their aim was to provide care for infants, incorporating few pedagogical strategies (Peralta, 2003).

Despite the advances made in terms of stressing the importance of ECE, enrolment rates remained low and ECE institutions were mainly situated in the big cities. Similarly, during the great depression of 1939, a large number of non-formal establishments were created in order to fulfil the need of health care and food provision for young children (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001; Peralta, 2003), which affected the way in which ECE was viewed. In this sense, there was a belief that these spaces were focused on what were known as *assistentialist* initiatives, that is, activities focused on covering children's basic needs, rather than promoting the learning and development of cognitive, socio-emotional and physical abilities.

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of Preschool Education was used in Latin America, as a way of referring to ECE as a stage before primary school. By doing this, there was a focus on promoting a curriculum that prepared children to enter primary education, rather than developing a curriculum specifically designed for ECE.

During the 1950's, an important movement began to promote ECE throughout the country<sup>6</sup>, incorporating ECE institutions in peripheral areas, industries and factories with female workers, hospitals and nitrate plants (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001). In addition, a seminar that entitled students with a specialized degree in nursery care was created, shifting the assistentialist focus to an educational one. Similarly, the Ministry of Education created plans and programs for ECE, which became one of the main guiding tools for the development of pedagogical practices in the ECE institutions. At a similar time, Chile became part of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education, OMEP (for its initials in Spanish) in 1956, being one of the first countries in the world to join this organization (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001). In this sense, even though the influence imposed by 'First World' intellectuals and organizations was important, there was also a local movement that aimed at stressing the importance of ECE from the beginning, configured by practitioners trained in Chile. Lastly, in 1970, with the promulgation of the N°17.301 Law, the National Board of Preschools (JUNJI, for its initials in Spanish) was created, becoming the first State institution in charge of providing ECE in the country (Adlerstein, 2012).

By 1973, initial training for ECE practitioners was being imparted not only by the University of Chile throughout its faculties across the country, but also by the University of Concepción, the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile and the Austral University. Similarly, curricular orientations were designed for all ECE grades between 1974 and 1981, focusing on what was seen as the active learning process of children (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001). However, even though these curricular orientations arguably strengthened the notion of ECE as a legitimate level of education, its pedagogical focus was diluted giving way to the assistentialist approach once again (Adlerstein, 2012). Additionally, with the establishment of the civic-military dictatorship in 1973, public participation in the creation of ECE institutions (the same as in primary and secondary education) was abruptly reduced, and private investors gained influence instead. At the same time, a series of alternative and non-formal ways

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<sup>6</sup> However, coverage of ECE remained relatively low during this period, and there is no official information as to how many children actually attended this educational stage.

of educating young children were created, promoted mainly by non-governmental organisations in low income and vulnerable contexts (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001), perpetuating the idea of early childhood establishments as care facilities and not educational ones. In relation to this, the National Foundation of Community Help was founded in 1974 (FUNACO, for its initials in Spanish), whose focus was to coordinate welfare programs to support the community. Thus, FUNACO also established open centres where children of low income homes could attend without any cost, implementing programs that focused on giving meals to children and taking care of them during long periods of time (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001).

With a democratic regime re-installed in the country and the emergence of the Quality discourse at the core of educational policies, FUNACO began implementing a series of initiatives that aimed at modifying its initial assistentialist purpose to a pedagogical approach. Thus, the organization became a private institution, dependent of the Ministry of Interior, and changed its name to the 'National Foundation for the Integral Development of the Child' (INTEGRA). Integra Foundation started its educational project, hiring professionals to work with the children, and developing training programs for the original staff, which was composed by mainly volunteers and the mothers of the children who attended the open centres (Adlerstein, 2012; Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001). Additionally, they underwent changes at the administrative level, leaving the assistentialist aspect of their programs to other institutions.

Following the general purpose of educational policies at that time, ECE was incorporated in some of the Quality programs implemented by the State. For instance, ECE was included into the MECE program, and 16% of the resources were allocated to this educational stage, aiming to improve the Quality of the service as well as expanding coverage of ECE throughout the country, which remained below the international average, especially in children under 4 years old (by 1990 only 28% of children between 2 and 6 years old attended preschool). Regarding this last point, a focused strategy was put in place, attending to vulnerable contexts and areas with more risk factors for children, with the joint participation of municipal and private primary schools that incorporated 2<sup>nd</sup> level

of transition to their levels, and Integra Foundation and JUNJI establishments. In addition, other alternative and non-formal interventions were created thanks to the resources delivered by the MECE program, as well as training programs for teachers and assistants (Adlerstein, 2012; Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001; Peralta, 2003).

With the end of the dictatorial period, not only a complex process of establishing democracy began, but also the consolidation of a childhood policy centred around the rights of children (Rojas Flores, 2010). In 1989, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the Children's Rights Convention, being ratified in Chile by both chambers in the congress and lately in the United Nations in August of 1990 (Adlerstein, 2012; Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001; Rojas Flores, 2010). This meant that the State had to promote the protection of citizens, through social, economic and political rights for all children under 18 years. Additionally, it had to design and implement different policies that could allow that promotion. Nine years after the subscription to the Convention, in 1999, ECE was recognized as an educational level in the Constitution of Chile, and two years after that, in the Organic Law of Education (LOCE), which consolidated the educational level and allowed the State to develop a preschool pedagogy (Adlerstein, 2012; Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001). Thus, ECE was positioned in a relevant place in terms of its importance to the overall educational process, both at a national as well as an international level.

Regardless of the numerous changes in the ECE arena during the transition period, by the end of the 1990's, preschool education still had poor and uneven national coverage as well as poor results in the assessment of Quality factors (defined in relation to international standards), which appeared to show that ECE interventions were no different than what the family environment could provide. This was interpreted as ECE not being able to foster social mobility, one of the main purposes attributed to this educational stage at the time (Adlerstein, 2012). Thus, from 2000 onwards, an increasing concern in relation to Quality ECE provision influenced the development of ECE policies in the country. During this period, the Ministry of Education developed the Progress Maps (in 2008), a document intended to complement the Curriculum Framework and support the

pedagogical work of teachers through the description of how the different expected learning of the curriculum should progress over time (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2008). During this decade, there was also a focus on developing policies to improve ECE teachers' Quality, such as the Guidelines for the Initial Early Years Teachers Training Programmes (in 2011) the Standardized Teachers National Assessment (in 2003), and the Standardized Assessment for Newly Qualified Teachers (INICIA) in 2008. Additionally, the new Curriculum Framework for ECE (Bases Curriculares para la Educación Parvularia – BCEP) was developed during a period of five years, and was approved on October 29<sup>th</sup> of 2001 (Cox, 2011).

With the development of curricular guidelines as well as standardized assessment for practitioners, the avowed aim of government reform was to promote Quality ECE in the country and assure its 'proper' implementation in the ECE institutions. However, I would argue that the development of such policies was still greatly influenced by international standards created by international organizations that had a specific approach as to what it meant to be 'developed', that is, a strongly economic and 'human capital' based approach to education. Even though there was an interest in including local aspects into the policies and recognizing the particularities of the context, most of the initiatives were centred around universal and rationalistic ideas, with an economic rationale having a big influence as to how to implement the initiatives.

As the development of policies focused in Quality were implemented not only in the educational system but in other areas as well, in 2006, a Presidential Advisory Council convened by the president at the time, Michelle Bachelet, was established with the purpose of analysing early childhood policies in Chile, and with the task of creating a report for evaluating the system and proposing modifications that would promote Quality (Rojas Flores, 2010). As a result of this evaluation, a comprehensive policy on early childhood integral protection called "Chile Crece Contigo" (Chile grows with you) was created and officially enacted in 2008, including early childhood policies in health, education, social development, among others, for children between 0 and 10 years of age, and organized around a comprehensive system that incorporated the interdisciplinary



work of diverse ministries (Chile Crece Contigo, 2014; Ley 20.379 of 2009; Rojas Flores, 2010). Its main purpose was to accompany children's developmental process from birth to their entry into the educational system (at 6 years old), focusing on children that attend the public health system. In addition, within the educational reform proposed by this government, the creation of a series of new institutions was included, with ECE as part of these modifications.

During the government of Sebastian Piñera (2010-2013), changes in ECE were mainly focused on the institutional framework, aiming at facilitating the implementation of reforms proposed by the previous government of Michelle Bachelet, that is, the educational reform and the creation of specific institutions and stricter regulations in terms of the creation of ECE services. Firstly, the Decree that established the minimum standards for ECE institutions to work (infrastructure, pedagogical material, teacher-student ratio, among others) was modified in 2012, due to larger modifications in the General Law of Education that set a timeline for institutions to fulfil the requirements established by this Decree (Decree N°115 of 2012; Decree N°315 of 2010). Additionally, in the last months of his government, Sebastian Piñera promulgated a law that established the Second Level of Transition as mandatory, extending mandatory education from 12 years to 13 years in total. Additionally, he established that the State had the responsibility of providing universal ECE to 3-year-old children (before this, the law established the responsibility of provision to children coming from 60% of the most vulnerable families).

Finally, the current President Michelle Bachelet created the National Council of Early Childhood (Consejo Nacional de la Infancia) on April 14<sup>th</sup> of 2014, an organisation led by the General Secretary of the Presidency Ministry, and including 6 ministries: Health, Education, Social Development, National Women Service, Justice and Treasury (Decree N°21 of 2014), whose mission is to advise the presidency in everything relating to the identification and formulation of policies, plans and programs that seek to guarantee, promote and protect the exercise of children's rights, and serve as a point of coordination between the different organisations involved in early childhood development. Additionally, and in concordance with a bigger social movement that fostered educational reforms

at all levels of education, a reform of ECE was proposed to the congress, being approved unanimously by both chambers. This reform is still being implemented, including the establishment of a Sub-secretary of Early Childhood Education, which began functioning in 2016 (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2014).

In sum, it is possible to see that ECE was developed in parallel to the rest of the educational system, and although it was first perceived as solely a space for care of children, there were still tensions as to what ECE was and what its purposes were from the beginning of its development in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in terms of universal standards versus local knowledge and contexts. Additionally, over the years, several institutions and organisations have been created, generating a multiplicity and overlap of roles played by the institutions involved in ECE, with responsibilities such as coverage goals, curriculum development, provision, regulation, and inspection being implemented by all of them, with no other autonomous institution to oversee and coordinate them (Dirección de Presupuestos, 2008; Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2013). Several institutions were created to address these issues<sup>7</sup>, however, there is still an overlap of roles such as provision and curriculum development. Thus, through the creation of additional institutions that were intended to help unify the system, an even more complex system was created, which leads us to wonder if this is a strategy that is maintaining rather than changing the current situation. Additionally, all of these measures are being implemented on the basis of a Quality discourse indisputably used by most policy makers, without questioning the concept itself, as a reflection of a larger system of ideas embedded in ECE and education as a whole.

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<sup>7</sup> The Superintendence and Quality of Education Agencies were created through the Law of Quality Assurance in Education in 2011, and both will now include an area specifically focused on ECE.

## PART II. THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Para turistas, gente curiosa, es un sitio exótico para visitar.  
Es sólo un lugar económico, pero inadecuado para habitar.  
Les ofrecen Latinoamérica, el carnaval de Rio y las ruinas aztecas.  
Gente sucia vagando en las calles, dispuesta a venderse por algunos USA dollars.  
Nadie en el resto del planeta toma en serio a este inmenso pueblo lleno de tristeza.  
Se sonríen cuando ven que tiene veintitantas banderitas,  
cada cual más orgullosa de su soberanía  
¡Que tontería! Dividir es debilitar.  
Las potencias son los protectores que prueban sus armas en nuestras guerrillas.  
Ya sean rojos o rayados a la hora del final no hay diferencia.  
Invitan a nuestros líderes a vender su alma al diablo verde.  
Inventan bonitas siglas para que se sientan un poco más importantes.  
Y el inocente pueblo de Latinoamérica, llorará si muere Ronald Reagan o la reina.

*For tourists, curious people, it is an exotic place to visit.  
It is only an economical place, but inadequate to live.  
They offer Latin America, the carnival of Rio and the Aztec ruins.  
Dirty people wandering in the streets, ready to sell-out for some US dollars.  
No one in the rest of the world takes this immense town seriously.  
They smile when they see that it has twenty little flags,  
Each one prouder of its sovereignty  
What nonsense! To divide is to weaken.  
Powerful countries are the protectors who test their weapons in our guerrillas.  
Whether they are red or striped at the end time there is no difference.  
They invite our leaders to sell their soul to the 'green devil'.  
They invent beautiful acronyms to make them feel a little more important.  
And the innocent people of Latin America, will cry if Ronald Reagan or the queen dies.*

(Latinoamérica es un Pueblo al Sur de Estados Unidos, Los Prisioneros)

## **Chapter 3. The Quality Discourse in Early Childhood Education: Tensions and Contradictions**

### **3.1 Introduction**

During the past decades, educational discussions at an international level, have been focused on designing initiatives to define, measure and improve *Quality*, replacing a previous focus on expansion and access to education (Acedo, Adams, & Popa, 2012; Adams, 1993). Thus, there is an apparent international consensus on the idea that improving Quality of education is fundamental to achieving educational and social goals, moving beyond initiatives focused mainly on access to the service. As Moss, Dahlberg and Pence describe it:

We live in what might be called the 'age of quality'. Quality is what everyone wants to offer and everyone wants to get. Quality is measured, managed, assured and improved. Every day the word 'quality' appears in countless places attached to countless activities, goods and services (Moss, Dahlberg, & Pence, 2000, p. 103).

This 'age of Quality' can be observed in several areas and services, being put into practice through a specific discourse. Thus, the 'discourse of Quality' in education, is reflected in policies designed in terms of the achievement of Quality standards, learning outcomes are measured by the Quality of the results, and education is evaluated according to the Quality of the service (Moss, 2007a, 2007b). Particularly, the notion of Quality in ECE services has gained currency during recent years, especially since this educational level has been presented as one of the most (if not the most) important stages in achieving developmental goals and learning outcomes (as mentioned previously in the introduction). Furthermore, there appears to be broad consensus in the fact that high Quality ECE services must be promoted to achieve the best possible outcomes. This can be observed both at an international academic level (Carneiro & Heckman, 2003; Acedo, Adams & Popa, 2012; Heckman, 2006) as well as at a national level through systematic literature reviews and impact evaluations of preschool programs (Bedregal, 2006; Contreras & Elacqua, 2005; Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006). Similarly, at a policy level, discussions have promoted the development of

Quality standards in education through analyses developed by international organizations (OECD, 2012; UNESCO, 2010; UNICEF, 2000).

In particular, different investigations and systematic reviews have established not only the criteria through which Quality can be assessed (Renk, Fennimore, Pattnaik, Laverick, Brewster & Mutuku, 2004; Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006) but have also described relations between those criteria, and 'positive outcomes' regarding children's further development, economic and social benefits, including learning outcomes in upper levels of education (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Carneiro & Heckman, 2006; Treviño, Toledo & Gempp, 2013). Similarly, there has been a growing interest both at an academic as well as a policy level in developing instruments to measure Quality in ECE services, and to implement this evaluation at an international level, comparing the performance of different countries and using this information to design a series of guidelines for ECE practice. In sum:

As in other fields, the discourse of quality in early childhood has been constituted by a search for objective, rational and universal standards, defined by experts on a basis of indisputable knowledge and measured in ways that reduce the complexities of early childhood institutions to 'stable criteria of rationality' (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 99)

Using these summarised stable criteria, a series of characteristics have been developed by agencies such as UNICEF (2000, 2002), UNESCO (2010) and the OECD (2012) for example, to define what a 'good' ECE service looks like, and what kind of results one should expect of such a service. In this sense, Quality has also been related as a concept to the field of developmental psychology in that, as well as in this field, Quality also looks to find 'objective' and 'universal' features that measure progress in an orderly manner, and thus, can be implemented in different settings and adapted to all contexts (Moss et al., 2000). From this perspective, then, both Quality and the child development discourse are situated by a decontextualized approach, looking to 'neutralize' context variables when making assessments, to obtain 'clean' results that are not affected by local characteristics. As Peter Moss describes the situation clearly:

We live in a world where the paradigm of regulatory modernity and the regimen of neo-liberalism are hugely powerful (...) In early childhood education, this dominance is expressed in the 'story of quality and high returns', with its own particular vocabulary: not just 'quality', but 'child development', 'developmentally appropriate practice', 'early intervention', 'programmes', 'assessment scales' and 'baseline assessment', 'investment', 'outcomes' (implicitly understood to refer to *predetermined* outcomes), 'returns' and 'human capital' (Moss, 2016, p. 13).

Regardless of its increasing emphasis, the concept of Quality has been elusively defined, becoming a rather diffuse and complex concept that has multiple meanings and by no means a unified definition. In relation to this, just as there appears to be consensus on the importance of promoting Quality in ECE services, there is also widespread agreement amongst critics when it comes to the idea that the concept is ambiguous in its definition. In reports sponsored by UNESCO and UNICEF (UNESCO, 2005; UNICEF, 2000), which have attempted a more humanistic reading of Quality, it has been argued that it is necessary to acknowledge its complexity, diversity, subjectivity and socially constructed nature.

Despite this focus on more humanistic discourses of Quality, it is notable that these international organizations have ultimately opted for a discourse of evidence and measurement, when evaluating Quality education and ECE policies. Specifically, this can be seen in reports such as the Starting Strong report developed by the OECD (2012, 2016), focused on assessing Quality of ECE around the world; UNESCO's report on ECE in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO, 2010), and The World Bank's report on Early Childhood Development in Colombia, Panama, and Chile (which included an assessment of different programmes aimed at promoting Quality development in early childhood) (Vegas & Silva, 2010), to name a few. Hence, despite the fact that considerable critique of the idea of Quality has appeared during the past years, as Peter Moss (2010) argues, most of the discussion around the concept of Quality has been essentially technical, where the concept itself is ultimately treated as an 'objective' truth whose dominant presence within the educational landscape cannot be questioned.

This Chapter will start with an analysis of how the concept of Quality was developed to become such a dominant term in educational discourse. Specifically, I will organize the discussion around the ways in which both international academic research as well as policy makers and international organizations, have over time approached and critiqued the concept of Quality, particularly in ECE, I will draw attention to the various political and ideological stakes of that research effort. Following this discussion, I will comment on how the concept has been problematized in each of the fields analysed, questioned and modified to fit other discourses, and how that process of questioning also reflects the contradictions present in the current discourse of Quality. Lastly, I will describe how the concept has been developed and used in ECE in Chile, critically reflecting on the use of the concept and arguing for the importance of questioning it further, taking into account the specific social/economic/political context of Chile.

## **3.2 The Emergence of Quality as a Milestone Concept in Education**

To understand how the concept of Quality has become positioned at the core of educational policies, and particularly ECE policies, it is important first to understand where it came from and how it was initially defined. Thus, I will describe its origins as a recent educational ideal, and how it became a dominant concept in educational settings.

### ***3.2.1 The Management Movement and Quality***

As Peter Williams (1995), a researcher who analysed different approaches to the concept of Quality in ECE claims, the concept originated in the private sector, specifically the US automobile industry that was looking to compete with rivals in Japan. The concept was introduced during the 1920s as a way of reconstructing the economy after the 'First World' War, by defining criteria that allowed manufacturers to produce reliable and predictable services and/or products. Thus, the concept of Quality has always been related to ideas such as dependability and consistency, being defined mainly as the features of a service

that satisfies a specific need (whether it be explicit or implicit), and also as a service or product that lacks deficiencies (Moss, 2010; Moss et al., 2000).

From the 1940s onwards, the concept of Quality was extended from a solely economic and managerial environment, to inhabit other areas such as public services in health, welfare and education, as Moss et al. argue (2000). This ease with which the concept was extended to these other realms suggests that the concept of Quality has broader origins, locating it as part of what is called the 'project of modernity', that is, the idea of a world knowable through the use of rational methods and the search of 'truth' (Habermas, 1983). According to this way of understanding modernity then, rationalization and quantification become the main tools through which one can achieve knowledge of the world, and as such, achieve Quality in the services provided. Similarly, there is a perceived or constructed need to identify, classify and categorize knowledge to reduce its complexity. As Dahlberg, Moss and Pence describe in detail in their problematization of the concept of Quality (1999):

The discourse of quality is firmly embedded in the tradition and epistemology of logical positivism...the concept of quality is primarily about defining, through the specification of criteria, a generalizable standard against which a product can be judged with certainty...[indeed] central to the construction of quality is the assumption that there is an entity or essence of quality, which is a knowable, objective and certain truth waiting 'out there' to be discovered and described (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 93).

From this perspective, Quality is associated firstly, with the idea of universality, that is, that there is something objectively present in the world which can be named as Quality (Moss, 2007b, 2010). Likewise, there is an idea that the concept, as an objective feature, can be achieved by following a series of steps which can also be objectively described. Lastly, it is also thought that Quality can be assessed by using standardized and quantifiable measures.

When the concept is transferred to public services such as education, there is also an assumption that Quality will be achieved by developing a series of 'universal' criteria that allow for the assessment of educational services. Similarly, as the concept of Quality is closely related to economic principles, many of the criteria developed have to do with economic indicators such as return of



investment or employability rates. In addition to this, the discourse of Quality has also incorporated another idea into the education system, that of the 'consumer' (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Drawing on this idea, 'consumers' of educational services (mostly taken to include the parents of the children attending school) are also given a role in evaluating the product, in this case, education, within a series of 'objective' guidelines (Moss, 2010).

Given that the definition of objective and universal criteria is the main tool through which Quality can be described and assessed, this task is carried out by a particular and very specific group of 'experts' in the field, that is, those who exert authority and power in the area (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss, 2007a, 2007b). Therefore, the process tends to be monopolized by a group of people in positions of power (such as politicians, academics working in mainstream or traditional institutions, and economists) that establish a series of criteria to determine what is to be described as being of Quality and what is not. However, just as the concept of Quality is a social construction originating in a particular context, the specification of such criteria is also influenced by the particular social, economic and political context, and thus, it is subject to change and subjectivity. Regardless of this fact, in the definition of Quality, the pursuit of it is viewed as an objective and technical process that can be based on rational and objective steps.

This notion of universality has made the concept of Quality appear as though it is something that exists independently from its definition and construction. In the process of positioning Quality as the main goal for every process (whether it be in the business world as well as human services), the concept has become securely attached to the idea that it refers to something 'objective' in itself, something that one can measure and identify in 'reality'. Against this dominant conception, it is important to emphasize again that Quality is not a 'neutral' concept. It is a "socially constructed concept, with very particular meanings, produced through (...) the 'discourse of Quality'" (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 87). Thus, it is necessary to question not only the way in which the concept has been ambiguously used to promote the design of public policies in education and in particular in ECE, but also to question the use of the concept itself, and how such use is intimately related to a specific ideology regarding the design and

implementation of educational systems, that is, a series of modernist and economic perspectives that are put into practice through the use of neoliberal initiatives.

### **3.3 The Discourse of Quality in Education: Different Approaches, One Concept**

Defining what we mean by Quality influences and is influenced by what we mean by Education. Thus, when talking about Quality, several definitions arise from different traditional approaches to the question of education (Barrett, Chawla-Duggan, Lowe, Nickel, & Ukpo, 2006). As I categorize these different traditions – for example via discussion of an Education For All Monitoring Report document prepared by UNESCO in 2005 that intended to organize several conceptualizations of Quality in education (UNESCO, 2005) – two major traditions are identified as having an influence over the concept of Quality. These are broadly categorized, for the purpose of my analysis, as: the economic approach and the humanistic approach. As I will discuss, although these two approaches may be opposed to one another in certain aspects (for example, a humanistic critique of economic approaches to Quality), they are not always opposed (where for instance, humanistic approaches to education can be used at times to further economic agendas).

#### **3.3.1 *The Economic Approach***

The World Bank is probably the institution that has most explicitly included economic factors when defining Quality in education. Specifically, the human capital approach (an approach derived from labour economics that focuses on the 'set' of skills a worker has, and how such skills can allow for the improvement of productivity and economy in his/her context) has relied on the argument that education is a powerful tool to foster economic advancement, developing cost-effective models relating learning outcomes and future success in the workplace (UNESCO, 2005). Thus, Quality is defined in terms of 'school efficiency', that is, as a series of inputs that lead to specific outputs (measured in terms of both structural resources and learning outcomes), promoting the acquisition of a series

of skills (literacy, numeracy, reasoning, among others) that appear to be necessary for future success in the labour market (Human Development Network, 2002).

As well as the World Bank, other international institutions such as the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) and the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank) have heavily relied on an economic standpoint to define what Quality in education means, using and promoting the use of standardized tests that aim to evaluate the attainment of specific skills closely related to the labour market (OECD, 2012; UNESCO, 2010). In relation to this last point, the economic approach has also been linked with more quantitative rather than qualitative methodologies to measure Quality of education.

Specifically, the human capital approach to education derives from an economic theory (human capital theory) that treats students as resources that must be developed for the benefit of the economic system (Monteiro, 2015). In this sense:

It is alleged that introducing market or quasi-market principles into the education system—privatization, competition, testing, etc.—increases its efficiency and promotes freedom of choice for families concerning the type of school wanted for their children (Monteiro, 2015, p.9)

Thus, market-oriented policies situate citizens as consumers, which in turn are seen as “self-interested individual(s) embedded primarily in economic relationships” (Brennan et al., 2007, p.378). Specifically, the possibility of consumers to choose the best possible service is presented as an efficient use of funds, and it is assumed that individuals possess sufficient data to make an informed decision, and that such data is delivered equally within social classes.

Additionally, within this economic approach, it is possible to include the idea of education, and particularly ECE, as a ‘social investment’, that is, as a social service that can boost human capital, and promote a better use of ‘underutilized’ human resources (Adamson & Brennan, 2014). In this sense, promoting Quality ECE has to do with developing ‘efficient’ policies that ensure the development of specific skills that are useful to the economic system. Particularly, this idea of

Quality ECE as a social investment can be understood also as a more social democratic approach that “combines social protection and social promotion”, as well as a mixed approach, that is, “the Anglo-Saxon, or third way, social investment approach which substitutes traditional compensatory spending with new investments in human capital” (Adamson & Brennan, p.49). Thus, even though the human capital or economic approach to Quality education is centred around market-oriented policies, it can also include more ‘humanistic’ or ‘socialist’ ideas that position individuals as social actors and promote education as a social right, rather than an economic asset. In this sense, visions of Quality from a more economic perspective can be confronted with humanistic approaches, but it is important to take into account that the way in which policies are designed, can include nuances and contradictions that make the distinction between Quality approaches much more complex. Next, I will describe the humanistic approach to the concept of Quality in education, highlighting the complexities of such definition, and how the use of binary categorizations may obscure the relationship between economic and humanistic views of Quality in education.

### ***3.3.2 The Humanistic Approach***

The humanistic approach described by UNESCO (2005) in its categorization of the definitions of Quality, is based on the notion that individuals have to actively engage themselves in their learning process, an idea that is closely linked with a constructivist learning theory. Along somewhat similar lines, it is argued that in a Quality learning environment, individuals are driven to construct their own meanings and the learning place becomes an area in which teachers are there to attend to the student’s specific needs in that process (UNESCO, 2005). This approach of active engagement in the learning process could also be read through an economic lens, as facilitating a supplier, entrepreneurially inclined learner, and hence worker, aspect that illustrates the complexity of categorizing Quality in a ‘binary’ manner (Bondarenko, 2007; Adamson & Brennan, 2014).

A particular approach developed by Hawes and Stephens (1990) that has been categorized by Barrett et al. (2006) as belonging to the 'humanistic approach' to defining Quality, divides the concept into three levels: efficiency, relevance and 'something more'. Specifically, the authors explain that Quality involves: effectively using the resources available to the system to obtain educational standards; that the form of education provided is relevant not only to the student but also to the social context in which the student is immersed; and that the educational process does not privilege economic benefits over personal growth (the 'something more' which they refer to). Interestingly, this definition reflects a mixture of an economic and a humanistic approach to the concept, where there seems to be an intention to restrain the economic dimension of Quality, but not fundamentally question it in its entirety, thus, maintaining certain neoliberal notions such as 'efficiency' and 'standardization'.

Another definition of Quality that is positioned in the humanistic approach is the one developed by Sayed (1997). In his analysis, Sayed acknowledges that the concept of Quality came to dominance as a reaction to an economic crisis during the 1970s, where approaches like 'Total Quality Management' were developed and then transferred to fields such as health and education (Sayed, 1997). Thus, the concept entails notions of efficiency, value for money and standards associated with a management approach to education. Additionally, he distinguishes between an 'idealist' and a 'fitness for purpose' definition of Quality (Sayed, 1997), where in the former, Quality is defined in terms of the achievement of a 'gold standard', whereas in the latter, Quality is achieved when the educational service attends to the needs of the 'consumers'. He goes on to criticize both approaches as he finds them incomplete and constructed from the standpoint of a specific part of society. In contrast, he proposes an alternative definition of Quality, recognizing its "essentially moral, political and ethical nature" (Barrett et al., 2006, p. 5). In this sense, his definition attempts to critique previous economic notions of Quality in opposition to it, while at the same time, recognizing them as 'incomplete' rather than refuse the human capital perspective as a whole.

Lastly, UNESCO's own view of what Quality in education entails, as we find reflected in its 2005 report can also be positioned, at least partly, within a humanistic approach, as its conceptualization of education includes a comprehensive way of viewing learning, and thus, of what Quality of education means in this context (UNESCO, 2005). This may also be seen in the 'Delors Report' developed in 1996 and cited in the 2005 publication, in which UNESCO proposes four pillars of education: 1) Learning to know: where students are able to learn not only relevant content but also the techniques and strategies necessary to develop critical thinking; 2) Learning to do: where students learn how to cope with different situations; 3) Learning to live together: where students learn to coexist with the broader community and get involved in its construction in an active manner; 4) Learning to be: where students develop their personal potential to the fullest (Barrett et al., 2006; UNESCO, 2005).

In sum, what 'humanistic' approaches to Quality have in common is, first of all, the idea that education entails not only quantifiable measures but also a more 'subjective' aspect that focuses on the integral development of human beings. Similarly, these approaches are interested in those areas of Quality that focus on the learning process of children, rather than just the outcomes of such learning process, giving emphasis to the importance of that 'something else' that is present in the educational process. Lastly, several of the authors and reports cited above who seem inclined to define Quality from a humanistic perspective, criticize the economic approach in terms of its lack of acknowledgment of the political and social nature of the concept. However, they do not seem to reject it entirely, rather they incorporate other aspects or intend to relativize the concept, without acknowledging the contradictions present in relativizing a concept that was created within a very specific discourse, and which carries with it, as a result: a rationalistic and 'scientific' discourse of knowledge.

### ***3.3.3 Common Aspects in the Definition of Quality in Education***

Independently of this categorization, there is also a notion that even though there can be very different approaches as to how Quality of education is defined, certain aspects of the concept appear to be 'universal', that is, independently of how Quality is thought of, or what theoretical approach is behind its definition, there are a number of features that should be recognized when describing the concept. In relation to this, UNICEF recognizes five dimensions of Quality, that is, five aspects that should be taken into account when defining the concept: learners, environments, content, processes and outcomes (UNESCO, 2005). Similarly, Adams proposes six common aspects amongst the various definitions of Quality present in the literature: quality as reputation; as resources and inputs; as processes; as content; as outputs and outcomes; and as 'value added' (Adams, 1993, p. 7), with some aspects being highlighted by certain approaches and other aspects being highlighted by other approaches.

In summary, even though some authors and international organizations have tended to develop a fairly divergent set of definitions of the concept, there is still a commitment to bring together those common features that Quality entails, emphasizing the idea that regardless of the different approaches one might take in defining the concept, there are certain aspects or umbrella terms that appear to be 'universal', and thus, should always be present when conceptualising Quality in education. In this regard, even though there is an attempt to categorize different ways in which Quality can be understood, there is also a felt need to establish standardized criteria as to what we mean when we define and measure Quality in education. This commitment to a universal idea of quality, a commitment that is implied but not always stated, does not preclude highly complex iterations of that commitment. In the following section, I will describe how the concept of Quality has been discussed in ECE research, and draw attention to the different discourses regarding education, childhood and society that these discussions, and their conceptualisations of Quality reflect.

### **3.3.4 The Discourse of Quality in Early Childhood Education**

As Peter Williams once claimed, “almost every publication on early childhood services contains the word Quality in its title” (Williams, 1995, p. 1). Arguably, this remains the case for many ECE publications more than two decades later. Indeed, one could argue that the focus on the measurement and analysis of Quality ECE provision has become a priority in academic research (Fenech, 2011; OECD, 2007). The field of ECE has, subsequently, tended to rely in its conceptualisation of Quality on a number of ‘experts’ (most of them coming from the United States and Europe) to define the criteria necessary to assess and evaluate the level of Quality of ECE policies and programmes throughout the world (Dahlberg et al., 1999). As such, the OECD report that analyses Quality in ECE argues for the importance of ECE relying heavily on ‘scientific evidence’ and ‘universal’ criteria:

A growing body of research recognises that early childhood education and care (ECEC) brings a wide range of benefits, for example, better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning; more equitable child outcomes and reduction of poverty; increased intergenerational social mobility; more female labour market participation; increased fertility rates; and better social and economic development for the society at large. But all these benefits are conditional on “quality” (OECD, 2012, p. 9).

International evidence used to address the relevance of achieving Quality in ECE relies on data that positions this educational stage as a future predictor of success of children later in school, as well as its positive impact on the development of children in different areas (Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006; Sims, 2007). In terms of social and economic benefits, some investigations have even stated that investment in this stage of education can reduce further expenses oriented to correcting school failure, abandonment and antisocial behaviour (Contreras & Elacqua, 2005). It would seem as though a specific discourse surrounding the concept of Quality has prevailed over others, that is, a discourse linked to economy and the development of particular skills that allow citizens to incorporate themselves into the modern society.



Taking this into account, it becomes not only relevant but necessary to discuss and question the 'universality' of the concept of Quality, by first establishing its origins and the specific discourses embedded in its definition. Thus, I will firstly describe how the concept has been used and defined within academic research, and later, I will focus on the different discourses in which the concept has been used, and how such discourses reflect specific ways of understanding childhood and ECE.

### ***3.3.5 Approaches to Research on Quality in Early Childhood Education: from a Focus on Access to Questioning the Concept***

According to a report led by Carmen Dalli for the Ministry of Education in New Zealand in 2011, two general perspectives can be found when looking at debates regarding the concept of Quality in ECE, that is, a 'philosophical' perspective where discussions are related to the meaning of the concept of Quality, and an 'empirical' perspective focused on defining factors and variables involved in assuring and promoting Quality ECE services (Dalli et al., 2011). Within these two frameworks, this report also recognizes three main overlapping phases or 'waves' of research on Quality, where a particular idea of the concept has prevailed over others (Logan et al., 2012).

#### **a) First Wave of Research: Maternal versus Non-Maternal Care**

During the late 1960s and 1970s, research on ECE was mainly focused on examining the "effects of maternal and non-maternal childcare on children's development" (Fenech, 2011, p. 103). As the main interest was to understand if childcare had a positive effect in children's development, studies were mainly focused in assessing whether or not ECE could be constituted as a safe/harmful environment for children. Thus, research did not include an analysis of the level of Quality of maternal and non-maternal care, but rather they focused on establishing the impact of attending childcare versus not attending childcare (Dalli et al., 2011; Logan et al., 2012).

## b) Second Wave of Research: Measuring the Environment of Quality ECE

As a result of the limitations encountered within the first wave of research (focused mainly on the impact of non-maternal care in children's development), a second wave of research began addressing aspects of the ECE environment that could promote or facilitate development outcomes in children (Fenech, 2011; Logan et al., 2011). As Lera-Rodríguez (2007) indicates, the first evaluation of the effect of ECE on children, the National Day Care Study, was conducted between 1974 and 1978 in 67-day care centres in Atlanta, Detroit and Seattle, USA, marking the beginning of a research approach focused on the measurement of Quality in ECE.

Following the National Day Care Study, a series of assessment tools were constructed and implemented to measure Quality factors, such as the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ITERS, for centres catering children aging from birth to two years old, and ECERS for centres catering children from two and a half to five years old, respectively). These instruments assessed elements of the ECE environment such as adult-child ratios, physical environment, and caregiver behaviour (Dalli et al., 2011). Instruments of this sort (mostly developed within a North American setting) became popularly used tools to produce research that enabled governments to develop policies based on 'reliable' and 'scientific' data. As Dalli et al. (2011) argue:

Developed within the North American context, the measures swiftly became a popular tool in research where an instrument was needed to produce valid and reliable information across programmes (Harms & Clifford, 1983a, 1983b). Subsequently revised by the original developers as the ECERS-R (Harms et al., 1998), and more recently extended by Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart (2006) as the ECERS-E, the ECERS measures remain widely used. The more recently developed Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) '...' also developed within a North American context, and aimed at assessing classroom quality in preschool through to third-grade classrooms, similarly includes research from this period among its references. (p.26)

### c) Third Wave: An Ecological Perspective on Quality

Together with a growing interest in understanding environmental elements that could influence how an ECE service was implemented, and what type of results it fostered in children, a third wave acknowledged the importance of also measuring elements such as adult-child interactions (both in terms of pedagogical and emotional interactions), family environments and child characteristics (Fenech, 2011). This idea was developed under the influence of a more ecological perspective regarding Quality of ECE, including aspects of socio-emotional relations and the socio-cultural context in which children experienced ECE services (Dalli et al., 2011; Fenech, 2011).

As a result of this new wave of research, international investigations relied on a series of generally accepted understandings as to what should be identified as Quality factors, where this were generally divided into structural and process indicators (Fenech, 2011). This categorization allowed not only for some measure of agreement in focus across academic research, but also allowed for some measure of agreement in policy documents and reports following in which the Quality of ECE was measured amongst different countries, for example, The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's longitudinal Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, implemented for the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).

This approach with its focus on structural and process based factors divided the aspects to be studied into those variables that are 'politically adjustable', that is, variables that can be easily altered by public policy (such as teacher-student ratio, teacher experience, infrastructure, among others), and variables related to the educational process and context (such as adult-child interactions, classroom climate, and type of activities).

Arising from this initial categorization, recent literature focused on the evaluation of Quality in ECE refers firstly to the structural dimension, as variables that allow for 'adequate' interactions in the learning environment (Inter-American Development Bank, 2006), which include infrastructure, health and safety elements, characteristics of the professionals involved in ECE, and child to teacher ratios. For the process dimension, the literature describes those aspects related to elements that directly influence children's daily experience such as curriculum implementation, frequency and type of interaction between teachers and children, between children and parents and between parents and teachers (Center on the Developing Child, 2007; Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, 2000; OECD, 2012; Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006; Sylva et al., 2004). In addition, the evaluation of such dimensions is made by reference to development outcomes in children, particularly in terms of cognitive and social development, which in turn results in a set of minimal conditions that would allow ECE to improve children's development (Lera-Rodríguez, 2007).

When evaluating the process dimension, recent studies have highlighted the importance of including 'qualitative' aspects of learning, especially socio-emotional factors. In particular, Quality interactions between teachers and children are defined as warm and caring, with the use of physical contact to provide a positive and loving setting, and with attention given to children's needs, experiences and ideas (Inter-American Development Bank, 2006). However, instruments used to evaluate Quality in ECE remain dominated by standardized tests that aim to measure 'observable' features as well as outputs and outcomes, where more 'qualitative' aspects of ECE are evaluated through a series of quantifiable measures that do not take into account the complexity and constantly changing aspect of Quality so explicitly mentioned in more recent investigations (Centro de Políticas Comparadas en Educación, 2015; UNICEF, 2000).

Even though there has been a recent focus on acknowledging the complex 'subjective' and 'socially constructed' nature of the concept of Quality in ECE (Ang & Wong, 2015; Fenech & Sumsion, 2007; Melhuish, 2001; Prentice, 2009), as well as the need to account for the 'qualitative' dimension of this educational level, most of the studies that reinforce the idea of Quality in ECE still use the same

standardized measures (which are mostly based on the dimensions of structure and process), and rely on this specific evidence to support the design of policies throughout the world, including in Chile (see for example Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller, & Rumberger, 2007; DeCicca, 2007, and in relation to Chile, see: Treviño, Toledo & Gempp, 2013; Narea, 2014). Furthermore, increased interest in the field of economics<sup>8</sup> regarding ECE has given much more emphasis to the quantifiable aspects of Quality, using standardized instruments to measure the ‘effects’ of ECE on children, and focusing on specific outcomes to promote the design of Quality ECE (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Belfield, 2007; Currie & Neidell, 2007; Temple & Reynolds, 2007).

This shift towards a greater ‘ecological’ understanding of Quality in ECE has promoted a new and more nuanced ‘philosophical perspective’ in terms of how Quality was defined, incorporating questions relating to how and who defines Quality in different contexts (Dalli, et al., 2011). In this perspective, in parallel to the development of this third wave, a more critical view started to promote the idea of reconceptualising Quality, especially in terms of its reduction to the analysis of the effects of ECE in children’s development (Ang & Wong, 2015). Specifically, many authors writing from the perspective of the global south have claimed that ideas regarding children’s development were based on Western values, and thus, do not take into account cultural differences in terms of what ‘normal’ development ought to be (Cannella & Viruru, 2003; Viruru, 2005). This critical approach to the study of Quality in ECE will be described in detail in the following section (3.4) of this Chapter.

#### d) An Expansion on the Waves of Research

Drawing on the categorization made by Dalli et al. (2011), Logan, Press and Sumsion (2011) have added further sub-categories, arguing that there are now seven major approaches to the study of Quality. According to the authors: “While not necessarily chronological or exhaustive, these streams join at certain points,

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<sup>8</sup> In 2007, a special issue of the journal “Economics of Education Review” was dedicated to Early Childhood Education. For more information, see Economics of Education Review, Volume 26, Issue 1.

overlap at others and sometimes run parallel in their emphases on quality” (p.5). In this sense, it is recognized that while some ideas and discourses appear to have more prominence than others in terms of what constitutes Quality in current research, there is not a pure and structured categorization of how Quality is defined, where each perspective can incorporate elements of other complementary and even contradictory ideologies.

Firstly, the authors recognize a first stream of research regarding economic and social gains in terms of providing Quality ECE services. This perspective includes longitudinal studies executed mainly in the United States such as ‘The Abecedarian Project’ and the ‘High/Scope Perry Preschool Project’, that centred around establishing a relation between ECE experiences and children’s learning and development in the long term (Logan et al., 2011). A second stream of research, also developed mainly in the United States, focused on the measures of Quality (similar to what is defined as the second and third wave of research in the report developed by Dalli et al.), identifying structural and process features, and relying on standardized assessment tools. Thirdly, another stream of research can be identified, in which investigators rely on the perspective of different stakeholders, including parents and children, with the purpose of including their views as to what constitutes Quality ECE, and acknowledging that different assumptions coming from different worldviews can contribute to understanding what Quality ECE is (Logan et al., 2011).

In parallel to these streams of research, a fourth stream focuses on the political, economic and societal influences on the construction and implementation of ECE services (Logan et al., 2011), highlighting the importance of considering the context in which several studies on the subject have been designed and developed, and how research has informed the design of public policies on ECE (and vice versa). Additionally, and linked to this fourth stream of research, is another stream, which is interested in analysing ECE policies related to Quality. This focus allowed for research to promote the inclusion of Quality on the policy agenda, and to inform policy reforms in terms of how to develop Quality ECE.

A sixth stream of research identified by Logan et al. (2011) has to do with the critique of the concept of Quality as an objective concept that informs both policy design and practice. Specifically, they claim that:

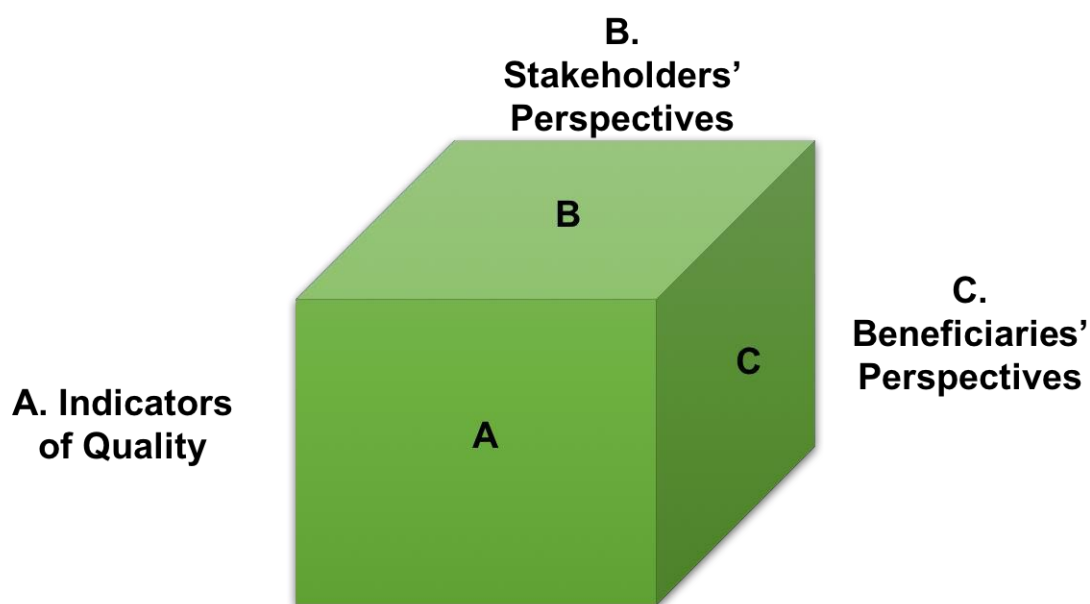
Related critique (...) points out that most research about quality ECE focuses on an end point (findings) without questioning the conceptualisations of quality underpinning the research. Critiques such as these consider quality as multi-perspectival (...) and challenge thinking about quality and how quality is determined. (p.6)

This stream of research questions previous definitions of Quality, highlighting its socially-constructed nature, and critiquing investigations that do not take this into account. Similarly, a seventh stream of research also questions the concept of Quality in terms of its 'universality', and focusing on the contextual aspect of the concept and promoting research that allows for flexibility and culturally embedded definitions of Quality ECE (Logan et al., 2011).

### **3.4 Problematizing the Discourse of Quality**

As mentioned in the previous section of this Chapter, despite the great emphasis given to the concept of Quality in education, some authors have problematized its definition, recognizing diversity in its interpretation, and especially, its socially constructed nature. As Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) argue, it is not as if discourses of objectivity and rationality are not themselves in crisis (what they refer to as the so-called crisis of 'the project of modernity'). This makes it all the more important to question concepts that rely heavily on 'universal' statements or that assume an objective reality which can be discovered and assessed through the use of quantifiable methods (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Various authors have indeed started to problematize the definition of the concept and begun to propose different approaches or at least ways of responding to this crisis. For example, Sayed (1997) argues that the concept of Quality is widely used but rarely clearly defined because it is constructed from a value-based standpoint, and thus, its ambiguity reflects the different values embedded in each definition.

To take another example, Martin Woodhead (1996) developed an image of a cube with three faces that represented the three dimensions involved in the definition of Quality (See Figure 3.1): a) indicators of Quality, b) stakeholders' perspectives, and c) beneficiaries' perspectives (Dalli et al., 2011). This image attempted to show how the concept of Quality is perspectival and context-bound, as opposed to 'universal' and 'objective', and that most existing models of Quality were in fact, based on Euro American epistemologies and ideologies. These assume that child development can be isolated not only as a field of study, but also as an area of intervention.



**Figure 3.1** Woodhead's Dimensions of Quality. Adaptation by N. Torres.

Adams (1993) also discusses the elusiveness of any definition of Quality in education, and emphasises the importance of questioning the concept in terms of who is defining it, that is, what kind of power relations are involved in its construction and how the definition of the concept reflects certain values and ideological standpoints. Similarly, he concludes that firstly, the concept itself has multiple meanings and thus, it reflects different values and ideologies according to who defines it. Additionally, for Adams, the concept of Quality has a multidimensional nature, involving complex relations between its various dimensions, and how they are described. Thus, he concludes that a comparison of different levels of Quality is a very difficult task since any definition and further



evaluation will entail a particular (and always therefore limited) interpretation of the concept. However, Adams nonetheless proposes a contextual definition which should always be 'negotiated' with the stakeholders (Adams, 1993), recognising its diverse nature but at the same time, its capability of being 'objectively' measured once its definition is clarified. It appears as though Adams intends to recognize the complexity of the concept (in a rather diffuse manner) he must maintain the idea of universality and objectivity when it comes to defining it.

Regarding investigations in the field of Quality in ECE, and the debates developed around the idea of its definition, Edward Melhuish (2001), a renowned British researcher recognized the value-laden nature of the concept, through his research involved in the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project in the UK. Specifically, by reviewing multiple longitudinal studies developed around the world, he concluded that while using observation tools to measure Quality in ECE was useful, it was not sufficient, and there needed to be an improvement in the way in which the context of the child was incorporated in the assessment of Quality (Melhuish, 2001). In particular, he proposed a 'hierarchical model' that looked at children within families, and also families in their contexts, communities and cultures, by using modern statistical analyses (Melhuish, 2001). By doing this, he claimed that a definition of Quality could be measured on its explicit benefits in terms of child development, by including different perspectives according to the contexts in which children were embedded. Thus, even though his critique of the definition of the concept of Quality recognizes the influence of the social context, it still affirms that it is possible to measure multiple indicators in order to assess Quality in ECE, thus maintaining the notion of Quality as an 'objective' concept.

Other authors have begun questioning the effects of using 'universal' definitions of the concept to measure ECE services (Fenech, 2011; Islam, 2010). In this sense, research has aimed at understanding the ways in which a universal discourse of Quality could negatively affect children and their families, especially those who come from vulnerable backgrounds and benefit from intervention programmes (Dalli et al., 2011). Elsewhere, research has pointed to how the discourse of Quality could be (re)producing certain 'truths' embedded in the

discourse of modern society, operating here as a form of Foucaultian technology of government (Ailwood, 2003; Langford, 2010). From another perspective, and in order to contest the 'universalism' of Quality, other investigators centred their research around the idea of including 'little narratives' (Islam, 2010), that is, specific interactions and experiences within an ECE centre, in order to define Quality in terms of opportunities and practices that enable children's learning.

In conclusion, there appears to be a rough consensus amongst researchers regarding the level of diversity and complexity present when defining Quality. As a result, one might infer that there is no "universal agreement as to what constitutes best possible early childhood services" (Sims, 2007, p. 11).

Though international organizations such as UNICEF have appeared to recognize the ambiguity of the concept and acknowledge its complexity and multidimensionality (UNICEF, 2000), they nonetheless insist on establishing 'consensual' or even 'universal' dimensions that could apply for every definition in every context (Moss, 2010). To this end, UNICEF (2000) proposes that Quality education includes: healthy learners who are supported by their families and communities; healthy environments that provide appropriate resources to promote learning; relevant contents that allow for the acquisition of specific skills such as literacy, numeracy, communication, among others; child-centred approaches applied by skilful teachers; outcomes related to established national objectives and active participation in society. Similarly, UNESCO (2005) and the OECD (2012) have also defined certain criteria in order to achieve and/or measure Quality of ECE in different contexts and educational systems throughout the world.

Although there appears to be some kind of practical agreement, in particular from international organizations, as to what a proper definition of Quality should entail and how it should be pursued, the description of such features remains ambiguous and context-dependant. Effectively, though attempts are made to define 'universal' features of Quality, local or subjective influences are also acknowledged, as if they could be built into a universal definition of Quality

without contradiction. Similarly, while there is some attempt to highlight the complexity and diversity of the concept, the instruments designed to measure universal characteristics of Quality education are highly specific and relate to a particular form of understanding the concept, for example those developed by international organizations such as PISA, TIMSS among others, and instruments specially designed to measure Quality in education (e.g. ITERS/ECERS, CLASS, among others). Thus, such instruments tend to obscure the recognized complexity of the concept.

Another way in which the problematization of the concept of Quality becomes contradictory, is when researchers use findings from international studies to argue for the importance of achieving Quality in ECE services, and at the same time present evidence that discredits such findings. For instance, a report sponsored by the Inter-American Bank of Development (2006) mentions that there is a great deal of evidence regarding the positive impact of providing Quality ECE to children, but that the majority of these studies were conducted in the United States, and specifically, in small pilot programmes rather than large scale initiatives. And yet, even though the specificity of the setting in which these studies were conducted as well as the method of research is acknowledged, this evidence is still used to promote the development of policies in ECE throughout the world as if they were universal constructs. Similarly, even though most large-scale impact evaluation studies in high income countries conclude that there is a positive impact of ECE on the cognitive development of children coming from disadvantaged contexts (Bedregal, 2006; Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006), research also shows negative results related to behavioural and socio-emotional development (Inter-American Development Bank, 2006). Much of this discussion remains located in the United States and Europe, with little evidence coming from Latin America and the Caribbean.

Although the concept of Quality is being questioned in terms of the way in which it is defined and by who, there still is a large body of evidence and research relying heavily on this concept and the 'universal' and 'objective' criteria developed previously (Moss, 2016). Furthermore, most of the evidence shown to promote the establishment of ECE initiatives throughout the world keeps coming from this

body of research, and focusing on developmental outcomes (Fenech, 2011), despite the fact that there is also a large body of evidence amounting to a problematization of both the concept of Quality as well as child development theories (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss, 2016). Standardized tests are still being used to evaluate the impact of ECE services on children, and the use of 'objective' and 'universal' criteria is still highly recommended both by international organizations as well as by politicians who utilize this discourse to promote the implementation of ECE policies.

### ***3.4.1 Underlying Definitions of Quality in Early Childhood Education Research***

In order to better understand the persistence of problematic assumptions in the discourse of Quality, it is worth turning to the work of Marianne Fenech (2011). This work offers a meta-analysis of the key assumptions underlying the latest research on Quality in ECE.

Firstly, Fenech (2011) makes the point that during the past three decades, most of the research involving Quality in ECE has been conducted in the USA (70.4% of 338 articles reviewed), followed by Europe (12.4%), the Asia-Pacific (7.7%), the United Kingdom and Ireland (4.7%), Canada (2.1%), with very little conducted elsewhere (0.01%) (p.105). Additionally, according to her analysis, research has mainly been developed within a positivist paradigm using mostly quantitative methodologies (and some mixed methodologies), although an increase in studies coming from a constructivist perspective was also identified.

In terms of the underlying assumptions regarding Quality of ECE, Fenech (2011) affirms that certain discourses coming from specific paradigms have prevailed over others. In particular, the discourse of Quality has been shaped by research conducted mainly in the United states and Europe, operating within a positivist paradigm, and using quantitative methodologies and standardized tests. In this sense, addressing the lack of research conducted in countries in Latin America for example, and the fact that most investigations rely on quantitative measures to define and assess Quality, the present study can be seen as a contribution to

the discussion of other ways of analysing and critiquing the concept of Quality, especially taking into account the way in which certain discourses have been embedded in the definition of ECE policies in Chile, through the use of the concept of Quality.

As a result of her research, Fenech (2011) identified six main definitions of Quality used in investigations relating to ECE. Firstly, Quality is defined as an 'objective reality', that is, a construct that can be identified by using quantitative, observable and standardized measures, particularly through the use of structural and process indicators, and standardized tools such as ECERS/ECERS-R. Secondly, as a concept, Quality is confined to outcomes associated with 'development' in specific areas, i.e. cognitive, language and socio-emotional development (Fenech, 2011). This could be related to the fact that measurements of Quality are being constructed to tailor the needs of national curriculums to prepare children for school, which at the same time, reduces Quality of ECE to getting children 'ready' for school, and also limits the definition of Quality to an evaluative concept only, rather than a descriptive one. As Sylva et al. (2004), argue in their report of the first major European longitudinal study on the effects of ECE on children's development (funded by the Department of Education and Employment of the United Kingdom):

The EPPE definition of 'effectiveness' is based on child outcomes, which was understood as a necessary but insufficient component of quality on its own. High quality provision is determined by the quality of child care and pedagogical practices that is offered as well. It was possible that care and pedagogy might be compromised at times. (Sylva et al, 2004, p. 34)

In this report, Sylva et al. (2004) highlight the importance of not only taking into account developmental outcomes as a form of defining and measuring Quality, but also of looking at the practices and interactions present in the ECE setting. In this vein, Fenech (2011) proposes that another way of broadening definitions of Quality is by including different stakeholders' perspectives on what Quality is, acknowledging the complexity of the concept within different contexts.

In terms of disciplinary influences on the concept of Quality, its conceptualisation is linked most strongly to psychology, rather than education, especially in terms of developmental outcomes, reducing the field of investigation to psychology 'experts', rather than education or pedagogical 'experts' (Fenech, 2011). Additionally, the author found that most studies are designed and developed from the perspective of the researcher, positioning him/her as an expert on the field, and diminishing the perspective of other stakeholders such as children, practitioners, and parents among others. Since Fenech published this study, however, there has been a growing interest in including the voice of children in the definition of Quality, which will be described in the next section of this Chapter.

Lastly, Fenech (2011) proposes that Quality is seen from an 'ecological approach' that acknowledges the importance of including elements of the setting, the families and children's characteristics. However, Fenech defines the ecological framework only in terms of family and child, without taking into account the influence of the social, political and ideological context in which ECE is embedded, especially in terms of how government policy is designed in relation to dominant conceptions of Quality, to promote ECE in their countries. In Fenech's analysis, the idea of ECE has been reduced to the effects of childcare in children from 3 years old onwards, leaving babies and toddlers out of most investigations, a perspective that supports the idea that ECE functions primarily as a means opportunity to get children 'ready for school', rather than as an educational stage in its own right.

In sum, these different approaches to the definition of Quality analysed by Fenech reflect the underlying discourses that promote the use of the concept to assess ECE services. These rely greatly on a positivist paradigm that universalizes the main features of Quality, obscuring contextual differences, as well as other perspectives relating what Quality is, and how it affects children's wellbeing (beyond developmental outcomes). Given this research context it becomes highly relevant to include a critical analysis of the concept, taking into account not only a psychological, positivist and developmental points of view, but also analysing the influence of broader discourses embedded in the design and implementation of public policies in ECE.

### ***3.4.2 Constructing the Concept of Quality through the Voices of Children***

Over the last three decades, influenced in particular by developments in the new sociology of childhood, the argument that children's perspectives regarding their experience in ECE institutions should be taken into account has gained momentum, with scholars aiming to include the voices of children in the definition and conceptualisation of Quality in ECE. Specifically, what the new sociology of childhood proposes is that children, as any other social group, are both constrained by the social structure as well as producing it through social practices that subsequently influence how the social order is shaped. This approach points to the fact that children act to transform their contexts and shape their subjectivities, often contributing to the reproduction of their powerlessness as minority social group through their actions (James & James, 2008; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). This research approach positions children in an active role, where they generally understand the rules of the culture in which they are immersed, being influenced by their knowledge of it, by their interactions with others and by their behaviours (Wood, 2014). This reflects, as Moss, Dillon and Statham (2000) argue, an increased interest in understanding childhoods as diverse and the result of socio-historical constructions, influenced by broader social and power relations.

A number of studies have been developed in different countries, looking to understand how children define Quality in their preschools, and how they evaluate it as well (Armstrong & Sugawara, 1989; Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2007; Clark, 2005a, 2005b; Einarsdottir, 2005; Harcourt, 2011; Kanyal & Cooper, 2010; Mooney & Blackburn, 2003). There is broad consensus across these studies that children have an important perspective that needs to be taken into account when describing ECE, nonetheless, definitions of what constitutes Quality vary greatly, as well as how children's perspectives are described and recognized.

Even though summarizing findings regarding studies that include children's perspectives about Quality ECE is outside the scope of this study, it is important to draw attention to some of the most common ideas developed by these studies. Firstly, participation in the preschool appears to be a major issue for children in these studies, as it is reported that they often feel excluded from decisions relating to their involvement in preschool (Bae, 2010; Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2007; Einarsdottir, 2005; Mooney & Blackburn, 2003; Theobald & Kultti, 2012). Similarly, children report that they enjoy activities that involve interaction with others as well as physical and outdoor play (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2007; Clark, 2005a; Mooney & Blackburn, 2003). In terms of relationships with others, children reported that they appreciate peer relations as well as relations with adults, and they emphasized the importance of caring and loving relations with their teachers (Armstrong & Sugawara, 1989; Einarsdottir, 2005; Mooney & Blackburn, 2003). Lastly, play was also reported as an important aspect of children's experience in preschool, and their conceptualisation of Quality, as they valued spaces to play (both inside and outside the classroom) and to be able to create games and activities with their classmates. However, it is necessary to take into account that these studies were carried out mainly in Europe and The United States, which suggests that there is still a global bias as to where children are being included in this kind of research, and which voices are being heard.

Many studies focus on what children enjoy most doing, and how they define their experience in preschool. For instance, in a study developed by Einarsdottir (2005), children were asked about the experience of going to preschool, about their likes and dislikes, and the role of adults inside the institution. Adopting a slightly different approach, Kanyal and Cooper (2010) asked children about their ideal school versus their actual school, and compared the answers. One might argue that, even though these studies are interested in understanding children's views on ECE, in their design they were based to some extent on a previous adult conceptualisation of what ECE is, and hence, what Quality in ECE involves.



Although children have been included as active participants in studies including those cited above, their views are nonetheless analysed from a perspective that validates Quality as the pivotal concept in ECE, rather than from a perspective that understands children's views as another form of meaning-making process that does not necessarily have to include Quality as its main concept. In this sense, while there is an interest in including children's perspectives when discussing and reflecting on the concept of Quality, there are still pre-fixed ideas of what the concept constitutes including a commitment to its fundamental importance. In this context children's notions and experiences are still constrained by and adapted to those previous ideas about what Quality entails and how it is defined by a specific adult discourse. Similarly, these studies are mainly conducted in preschool settings, where children interact with adults in an already restricted manner, and thus, their experience of preschool is constrained by local, social and cultural discourses that can obscure the power relations embedded in such settings. Many of these studies also happen to be located in the global north. Even though there are studies that focus on how children make sense of their preschool, or the influences of the broader social context in how children participate in their ECE settings (Bae, 2010; Einarsdottir, 2005; Hoskins, Pence, & Chambers, 1999), it is still risky to use these studies as evidence of children's experience around the world, and in particular, in a preschool setting in Chile. Moreover, insofar as this study hopes to contest and critique the concept of Quality, focusing in particular on its treatment as an 'objective truth' by the educational system in Chile, my research focuses on children's experience rather than on developing a preconception of what Quality is. In this respect, I choose to analyse how children make meaning of their experience, exploring how this relates (or not) to 'official' conceptualizations of Quality, and how the specific language and discourse present in such conceptualizations shapes the way the social world is understood (Moss et al., 2000). With these considerations in mind, as I focus on the way childhood is understood, and how the concept of Quality is related to broader conceptualisations of childhood, I will also explore how this is

influenced and constituted by the “power relations and dominant discursive regimes” (p. 237) present in the country.

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss, Dahlberg, et al., 2000) propose an alternative way of approaching ECE, one that does not focus on Quality and whatever its definition can bring, but rather focuses on the idea of ‘meaning making’. For these authors, knowledge is complex, diverse, and situated. As such, education and pedagogical work is a political and ethical endeavour, and thus, ECE services ought to be evaluated through the co-construction of meaning by every actor involved in that context. As they argue:

The concept of quality seeks to judge the conformity of practice to predetermined norms and outcomes: it is about establishing conformity to predetermined standards. It seeks closure, in the sense that it wants definitive answers about conformity, often reduced to numbers. The discourse of meaning making, in contrast, is first and foremost about constructing and deepening understanding of the early childhood institution and its projects, especially its pedagogical work - to make meaning of what is going on. It assumes that the meaning of pedagogical work, and its value, is always open to different interpretations: in short, it is contestable. It therefore foregrounds provisionality, multiplicity and subjectivity, rather than closure, standardisation and objectivity (Moss, Dahlberg, et al., 2000, p. 110).

From this perspective, meaning-making is made possible through the constant discussion and critique of experience in ECE, involving democratic practices that are built to include all the key actors involved in the educational context (Moss, 2010). I would argue that, only by constantly questioning and opening to different points of view regarding ECE, is it possible to make judgements about the values and beliefs that support the pedagogical work of a preschool. Only on this basis is it possible to seek agreement with others about the judgements made, in such a way that acknowledges the partiality of the meanings co-constructed.

In my research, I focused on these principles of critique and co-construction to understand the perspectives of children, and how they construct their experiences in an ECE setting. What interested me was how children construct meaning about their preschool, and how such meanings influence the way in which they make sense of their experience in that setting. Additionally, what I aimed to understand was how these conceptualisations made by children in

terms of 'what makes sense' to them, are related, influenced, and resisted by the official discourse, that is, a discourse centred around the concept of Quality in ECE. In this sense, I did not intend to define, redefine or reconstruct the concept of Quality through the voice of children. On the contrary, I aimed to reconstruct how we understand the different meanings children have of their preschool setting, and how such meanings are related to what is defined as Quality, taking into account the restrictions and tensions present in the context of an ECE institution, especially in terms of the power relations put into practice in that setting, as well as in the broader social system.

### **3.5 The Problematization of Quality in ECE in Chile: Between Locality and Universality.**

In Chile, the issue of Quality has been at the centre of educational reforms, especially from the 1990s onwards. Politicians and technicians have focused their efforts on improving Quality in education. The field of ECE in particular has been included in governmental programs as a major priority, fostering interventions that aim to achieve Quality goals from the first years of age (Adlerstein, 2012; Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2013). In relation to this, the concept of Quality has been used in several presidential speeches throughout the years as a keystone of the educational reforms developed by the governments following the dictatorship (Aylwin, 1990; Bachelet, 2006; Frei, 1998; Piñera, 2013). Quality has become a key concept in the design of almost every policy in ECE, where it appears to be treated almost as a goal in itself rather than a feature of a particular educational system.

As suggested in an official report regarding the 'State of the Art' of ECE in Chile, there is apparent consensus amongst policy makers relating to the importance of developing public policies that promote Quality ECE. It is significant that the report draws on national and international evidence to support this claim (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2013). In this context, the need to define what is meant by Quality has also become important, especially during recent years where major reforms have come into place, with special emphasis on the

development of Quality assurance systems as well as institutions solely dedicated to promoting and regulating the achievement of Quality standards.

In 2002, UNICEF organized a debate in Chile involving some of the most prominent names related to ECE worldwide, including a range of researchers, academics, policymakers and people working in the management of ECE institutions at the time (UNICEF, 2002). In that debate, it was already acknowledged that the definition of the concept of Quality was very heterogeneous, firstly because its definition was closely linked to the concept of ECE in itself, and secondly because of the socio-historic context in which ECE was developed in Chile. In the face of these complicating factors, it was argued that it is necessary to develop a unified, but nonetheless contextually specific definition of Quality. In particular, the debate showed some of the concerns that have gained purchase also in the international debates regarding ECE and the concept of Quality, that is, the importance given to standardized tests that measure academic achievement, which risk 'ignoring other dimensions in which early childhood education makes contributions: the spiritual and value dimensions for example' (UNICEF, 2002, p. 10); and the lack of representation of particular contexts inside the country, when designing and implementing impact or evaluation studies in ECE. Furthermore, in this debate, the pertinence of previous national and international evaluations in ECE was relativized given its questionable similarity to the reality of the Chilean ECE system.

Additionally, the summoned experts agreed with the fact that the concept of Quality is relative and that adopting international standards can be a risky strategy because it can endanger the proper assessment of children with different capacities or different value-based cultures. Similarly, it was argued that Quality has been mainly defined by 'experts', but there is a need to include other key actors in the process of definition, acknowledging their role in the construction of ECE policies (UNICEF, 2002).

Another study developed by Pardo and Woodrow (2014) addressed the tensions present in the discourse of Quality in ECE between policy design and the teachers' perceptions of that policy. In this study, it was argued that the main reason why ECE gained so much prominence during the past years in Chile was due to three factors: firstly, because international studies appeared to show that ECE can significantly reduce educational inequalities improving children's development and future school outcomes; secondly, because of its apparent economic benefits, where studies assure that investing in ECE provides the highest return of investment; and thirdly, because the development of ECE services can foster female participation in the labour market. Despite their potential influence, it is notable that none of these factors are related to the guidelines and values that serve as the foundations of ECE in Chile, and that have been historically present since the beginning of ECE services in the country. Drawing attention to this tension, the study claims that teachers have been critical of how ECE policies are being designed during the last years, since they perceive them as undermining the main objectives of ECE. Additionally, the study concludes that the voices of teachers have been somewhat excluded from the Quality discussion, and that teachers on the other hand, have been boycotting the implementation of ECE policies, particularly those intending to form alliances with upper educational levels as a possible 'strategic pathway to subverting the dominant discourse' (Pardo & Woodrow, 2014, p. 111), that is, a discourse focused mainly on economic factors.

As the above study suggests, there is growing concern in Chile in terms of the lack of definition of the concept of Quality, and even more, of the tensions and contradictions that arise when analysing different approaches and discourses regarding Quality in ECE. In relation to this, Adlerstein (2012) (a recognized Chilean academic in the field of ECE) argues that the concept of Quality in ECE has remained ambiguous in its definition, even though its use has become almost obligatory when addressing issues of ECE policy-making. As she comments:

The issue of quality has become one of the (discursive) pillars of the educational policy of the preschool level and its 'common sense' (...), but this has nothing to do with its technical precision, but precisely with its diffuse nature. Quality of preschool education in the political discourse appears as a significant concept, a mobilizer, laden with emotional and value-based force, being extensively handled in society (Adlerstein, 2012, p. 36).

Thus, the use of the concept does not necessarily imply that there is a unified idea of what it means. This absence of definition is not necessarily a problem, however, at least not from a policy perspective. It can be precisely its ambiguity what makes the concept so appealing to political use, because it relates to an emotional and value-based perspective, and to that 'something else' that is to be achieved by the policies developed (Casassus, 2003). In this sense, this 'something else' acts as a space where different and even contradictory ideas are included in how Quality is defined, without thoroughly reflecting on them. Additionally, the use of the concept has not meant that policies developed based on the promise of the 'improvement of quality' work in a coordinated fashion or furthermore, that they are designed taking into account previous policies or strategies that supposedly aim to achieve the same objective (this being 'Quality' ECE).

Drawing on this growing concern and with the fact that the reform process being held currently in Chile has Quality at its core, one of the institutions created to promote Quality of education (the Quality of Education Agency<sup>9</sup>) recently ordered a study that aimed to describe and analyse the concept of Quality in ECE, including social representations constructed by key actors of ECE in Chile. This study was jointly conducted by the Alberto Hurtado University, the Centre for Compared Policies in Education of the Diego Portales University and financed by the Quality of Education Agency, and consisted of a case study of international initiatives in ECE and their definitions of Quality, as well as interviews and focus groups with: experts and academics in the field of ECE in Chile; actors involved

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<sup>9</sup> The Quality of Education Agency is a public service, functionally decentralized, with an exclusive council, endowed with legal personality, its own assets and which is related to the President of the Republic through the Ministry of Education. The purpose of the Agency is to assess and guide the educational system so that it is aimed at improving the quality and equity of educational opportunities, that is, that every student has the same opportunities to receive a quality education (Quality of Education Agency, 2018)

in the implementation of public policies in ECE; members of public ECE institutions; head teachers, teachers and teaching assistants working in ECE services; and parents and children; as well as documentary analysis (Centro de Políticas Comparadas en Educación, 2015). The study argues that even though Chile has developed a series of policies aiming to improve the Quality of ECE since the 90s, there is no clear definition of what Quality of education is or how it should be achieved. Nevertheless, its authors recognize the structural and process-based factors as 'universal' dimensions to analyse in terms of their presence both in the international cases studied, as well as the social representations and conceptualizations made by key actors.

As one of its main conclusions, the study claims that none of the international cases has a clear definition of what Quality is (except for the case of Colombia), and that despite the fact that Chile also does not have a clear definition, the public institutions involved in the provision of ECE services have made an effort to develop their own definition of the concept, with a close relation to other concepts such as equity and inclusion (Centro de Políticas Comparadas en Educación, 2015). As for the conceptualizations made by key actors, the study concludes that there is agreement in the fact that there is no clear definition of the concept of Quality, as well as the need to construct a unified description of it, considering the local context as well as the main purpose of ECE, that is, the integral development of children in a protected environment. Thus, there seems to be a contradiction between how the concept is recognized as undefined, while at the same time, specific initiatives and Quality assessments are still put into practice as public policies, a contradiction that is not approached by the study in a more critical or in-depth manner.

Lastly, in terms of its recommendations, the study proposes that it is necessary to consolidate a clear definition of the concept of Quality from a participatory perspective, that is, with a process where different actors can actively engage themselves in the description of Quality criteria (Centro de Políticas Comparadas en Educación, 2015). Similarly, it proposes that it is necessary to develop a series of standards that allow for stronger regulation to ECE services, claiming that "it is not possible to ensure the Quality of an educational system solely on a system of

evaluation and supervision” (Centro de Políticas Comparadas en Educación, 2015, p. 355). Perhaps here another contradiction appears from within the recommendations of the study, where even though there is recognition of the fact that the concept is elusive and ambiguous in its definition, the need to develop standards relies on the idea that Quality does have some kind of translatable consistency that can be measured and promoted through a series of previously agreed upon criteria.

It is interesting to note that even though there is a recognition of the fact that there is no clear definition of the concept of Quality, and that even when analysing international experiences, the concept is still ambiguous and diverse in its construction, the study still uses the dimensions mentioned above and used in international studies regarding ‘universal’ factors that should be present in any definition of Quality in ECE. Here, the tensions present in the problematization of Quality mentioned by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2000) also appear, as there is a contradiction between proposing the definition of a concept taking into account the local context and the relative nature and diversity of that context, but at the same time, assuming a conceptual universality in terms of the dimensions that should be incorporated in such definition, and furthermore, that the use of standards is necessary (which can be used also to compare with international evaluations of ECE) to ensure the achievement of Quality goals. For this reason, it becomes even more relevant to analyse from a critical perspective, why the concept of Quality is still being regarded as the main focus of ECE policy development, and ask what is the hegemonic discourse lying behind the use of Quality, as well as what are the tensions and resistance strategies present in the context of ECE in Chile.



### **3.6 Problematizing Quality in ECE: Emptying and Re-filling a Dysfunctional Vessel**

The solution proposed by international organizations and renowned academics for the problematization of the discourse of Quality has been to make its definition flexible, context-dependant, diverse and local. However, this apparent solution seems to disavow the fact that the concept of Quality itself has a very specific origin, that is, in an economic and positivistic epistemology that relies on particular ideas regarding 'objectivity', 'universality' and 'rationality'. Thus, the idea of relativizing and localizing the definition of Quality is contradictory in itself because the concept was conceived from a perspective that does not allow such an exercise. In a sense, what academics and researchers have appeared to do is to empty the 'vessel' of Quality and propose it be re-filled with notions of 'complexity', 'diversity' and 'locality'. However, what ends up happening is that even though the 'vessel' has been emptied of meaning, it remains the same shape and thus, when trying to relativize its content, a contradiction appears as there is still a desire to 'measure' this 'subjectivity' and 'locality', entailing a return entailing a return to the positivistic nature of the concept. Similarly, through the analysis of different assumptions and perspectives underlying the use of the concept of Quality in research, it can be shown that even though there appears to be a greater discussion as to what Quality means and how it should be assessed, most research is still unable to fully escape the underpinning positivist and psychological-developmental approaches of a Quality based discourse, which draws research interest back to a focus on outcomes rather than practices, thus, maintaining the notion of 'universality' of Quality, that is, the original structure of the 'vessel'.

At times, the 'vessel' of Quality is filled with other empty 'bowls', that is, new concepts such as 'appropriate', 'integral development', 'full potentiality', 'effectiveness', among others. Such concepts, even though they may appear to belong to different approaches (for instance, a humanistic versus an economic approach to Quality), are also marked by their own ambiguities, which in turn make the concept of Quality even more ambiguous. Thus, this attempt to re-

define Quality might simply be distracting us from the fact that it remains undefined, or put in other words, that it cannot be re-defined since its basic origin and construction is based on the idea of the existence of an 'objective' reality that can be defined and assessed by a series of particular criteria developed by a group of 'experts'.

### **3.7 Summary of Chapter**

In conclusion, the problematization of Quality appears to be itself, equally as problematic as what it intends to question, and thus, it is important to question not only how Quality is defined, but also its explicit or implied positioning as a valid and 'objective' concept. In addition, it is necessary to further reflect on the contradiction present also in the discourse of Quality in Chile, and how, even though there is a strong intention to define Quality, the criteria used remain largely the same, as well as the 'experts' who are in charge of the defining process. As the next Chapter will explain, the use of a theoretical perspective such as postcolonial theory, can allow for a further problematization of the use of the concept of Quality, taking into account the historical and social context of Chile, and the power relations developed within a neoliberal and neo-colonial discourse. Similarly, including a feminist perspective can help highlight how social structures (and particularly structures related to how children and women are positioned) are reflected and perpetuated through the use of specific discourses, in this case, the discourse of Quality in ECE.

## **Chapter 4. Postcolonial Theory: Questioning the Quality Discourse in ECE in Chile**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The development of ECE in Chile is situated in a very specific social, economic and political context, described in the first section of this thesis. Thus, it becomes imperative to incorporate such context into the analysis of Quality and its different conceptualisations. Specifically, the use of postcolonial theory to analyse the context of Chile is useful in that it allows for a critical approach towards the development of neoliberal policies in the country. Similarly, the use of postcolonial theory with a feminist lens allows me to engage in a critical analysis of how children are positioned in society, how their education is defined (and in relation to what), and how power relations within ECE institutions influence the way Quality is defined (and reproduced as an 'objective' concept), as well as how children can act in resistance to hegemonic ideologies.

This Chapter will start with a section describing how postcolonial theory becomes a useful theoretical tool to analyse the neoliberal context of Chile, and following that, a section which defines the main ideas of postcolonial theory. I then focus on how postcolonial theory can be used in the critique and analysis of ECE policies, and specifically in the use of the concept of Quality. Lastly, I will describe feminist postcolonial theory and how it can work as a lens to not only question the colonial discourse, but also how it allows for the creation of spaces of resistance and transformation within ECE practice.

## 4.2 Postcolonial Theory and the Context of Neoliberalism in Chile

Postcolonial theory can be described and defined in several ways, and as such may be viewed as a 'contested terrain' where processes and analyses of the relationship between knowledge and discourse come together (Rizvi et al., 2006). In general terms, it refers to the critical analysis of new forms of colonialism, that is, those developed in 'democratic' cultures established after the colonization period (hence the 'post' in postcolonialism) (Tikly, 1999). Postcolonial theory seeks to challenge hegemonic forms of knowledge (mainly centred around Western/Enlightenment discourse and more recently, in the 'globalization' discourse) emphasizing the relationship between these cultural/epistemological assumptions and the maintenance of inequalities and injustices (Andreotti, 2011). Similarly, as Leon Tikly expresses, "postcolonial theory seeks to deepen understanding of the colonizer/colonized relationship by drawing attention to processes of transcultural 'mixing' and exchange and to the complexities of diasporic identification" (Tikly, 1999, p. 607). Thus, postcolonial theory not only focuses on the analysis of the discourse of, for instance, globalization, and its proliferation as a universal ideology, but also seeks to understand the complexities embedded in its adoption which are not as pure as might be assumed from the colonizer's perspective, being filled with contradictions and forms of resistance arising from local culture/knowledge.

Scholars have tried to differentiate the 'post' in postcolonial theory from other theoretical approaches such as postmodernism and poststructuralism. According to Subedi and Daza (2008), if postmodernism is focused on the analysis of the 'collapse' of modernism in the context of European history, postcolonial theory focuses on the continuity of a colonial discourse even after the end of *de facto* colonialism, assuming that we now exist under conditions of neo-colonialism instead. Thus, the idea of 'post' within the concept of postcolonial is understood as a symbol of that continuity. Similarly, for Andreotti (2011), whilst all three 'post' traditions (postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism) share the questioning of the project of modernity and the institutions embedded in such projects, as well as focuses on how the discourse of modernity is constituted;

postcolonial theory differs in that it entails a much more radical engagement with political issues, including a more explicit relation with Marxist ideas.

According to Gandhi (1998), the hegemonic discourse of Western rationality (or in this sense, capitalist and neoliberal forms of thinking) establishes specific parameters that define what is valid, and what is and is not worthy of being communicated. These parameters at the same time establish a sense of unanimity and consensus, where for example, in the educational system, concepts like 'development', 'quality standards', 'learning achievement', 'human capital' among others, appear as though they are universal markers for what constitutes a good education, and are used to guide the design of policies in most educational systems in the world.

Postcolonial theory seeks to critique and make explicit the ways in which forms of colonialism are still present in current societies, where the colonized are immersed in a context where the local and the global are intertwined, obscuring the perpetuation of inequalities that lie behind the discourse of globalization and development (Andreotti, 2011). Thus, postcolonial studies aim to critically look at different phenomena in order to understand how the relationship between colonizer and colonized is constructed, and how the tensions and contradictions present in such relationships can become spaces for resistance and transformation. In particular, postcolonial theory can enable us to analyse educational policies from a critical perspective, acknowledging that the 'official discourse' may not necessarily be taking into account local culture and knowledge, and even more, it may be crystallizing concepts to appear as 'objective' and 'universal', obscuring their political and ideological nature. Specifically, in the context of Chile, postcolonial theory is especially useful as the country has experienced colonization in its original form as well as now being part of the neoliberal/capitalist empire. Thus, the use of postcolonial theory can allow me to delve into the power relations embedded within the ECE context, and in particular, investigate how the conceptualisation of Quality reflects such relations, and how contesting the concept can promote spaces of resistance.

#### **4.2.1 The Foundations of Postcolonial Theory: Definitions and Redefinitions**

To fully understand the ideas of postcolonial theory and its relation to the context of Chile, and ECE in particular, it is necessary first to describe the main postulates of this approach, as well as defining and redefining its main concepts as a way of unveiling the tensions and contradictions present in the relation between colonizers and colonized.

The words imperialism and colonialism are often used indiscriminately. According to Mohanty (2006):

Colonization has been used to characterize everything from the most evident economic and political hierarchies to the production of a particular cultural discourse about what is called the Third World. However, sophisticated or problematical its use as an explanatory construct, colonization almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination and a suppression – often violent – of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question (p.18).

Colonization defined in these terms, involves not only the geographical conquest of spaces, but also the economic and political conquest of them. On the other hand, imperialism can be characterized as “an exercise of power, either through direct conquest or (latterly) through political and economic influence that effectively amounts to a similar form of domination” (Young, 2001, p. 27). In this sense, these definitions have much in common as both include direct forms of conquest as well as ideological forms of dominance. Nonetheless, there are scholars who make distinctions between both practices, whether in terms of time, space, and forms of power (Loomba, 1998).

Even though both processes involve the “takeover, subjugation, and control of one group of people by another” (Cannella & Viruru, 2003, p. 14), the purpose of such an exercise in power can be distinguished between settlements established for colonial projects, or exploitation of natural and human resources for imperial projects. In the first case, the attempt was not only to conquer geographical areas but also to ‘civilize’ the population and impose particular ideologies, whereas in the second, the aim is centred around other ideas related to internal conflicts

within the imperialist countries. Nonetheless, Lomba (1998) cautions against simplifying the differences between colonialism and imperialism, as both terms entail expansion and economic intentions as well as the need to 'export' internal conflicts.

In relation to the complexity of differentiating both practices, Smith (1999) sees colonialism as an expression of imperialism, that is, imperialism involving not only the physical conquest of geographical spaces but also the economic and ideological conquest of its population and culture. Similarly, Lomba (1998) distinguishes colonialism and imperialism in terms of space, where the result of imperialism is ultimately one of colonialism. In this sense, for the purpose of this research, it is best to describe the current process of dominance as it is explained by Lomba, where imperialism implied the restructuring of local economies provoking imbalances leading to the growth of some (in this case European countries and later the United States) at the expense of many, and creating a "global system of capitalist imperialism through which capitalist economies established colonies that could provide human resources (like labour) to maintain the colonizers' capital growth" (Cannella & Viruru, 2003, p. 15).

It is worth emphasising that new forms of colonialism (or neo-colonialism) are rooted in forms of ideological, cultural, economic and political dominance by an elite that works within a capitalist/neo-liberal system. As such, postcolonial critique challenges this discourse by bringing different approaches and disciplines together to question western imperialism and forms of oppression, as well as searching for ways of transforming power relations (Cannella & Viruru, 2003). As Abdel-Malek describes, current imperialism takes the form of a hegemonic imperialism, where a form of rationalized violence is exercised:

By the combined action of the military-industrial complex and the hegemonic cultural centres of the West, all of them founded on the advanced levels of development attained by monopoly and finance capital, and supported by the benefits of both the scientific and technological evolution and the second industrial revolution itself (Abdel-Malek, 1981, p. 146).

Edward Said's book *Orientalism* is recognized as a seminal work in terms of the development of postcolonial theory, in which Said describes how Western systems of knowledge have come to subordinate the non-western world, and how this process is not an unconscious or accidental one, but on the contrary, a more or less deliberate strategy pursued by individuals and institutions (Said, 1978). According to Said, the discourse concerning Eastern culture is constructed in the West as an attempt to dominate the East, and thus, what this discourse implies is the inferiority of Eastern culture to create and maintain its hegemony. The discourse of the East, or of the 'Other', is constructed through a series of ideas and assumptions that essentialize the identities of both East and West through a process of dichotomizing the representations of each culture, at the same time reifying the perception of difference between them (Said, 1978). Therefore, the East is characterized by features that are deemed inferior to those of the West, and even though other positive qualities are mentioned, they remain within a stereotypical construction that confirms the inferiority of the culture according to Western society.

In relation to the ideas of Said, Occidentalism or the Western discourse is constructed as superior and more advanced than other forms of thinking, having developed common myths that prevail as if they were 'objective truths', that is: 1) the notion that there is one universal truth that can be obtained through the use of the scientific method; 2) the idea that colonization is no longer present in current societies; 3) and the belief that some countries or continents are 'underdeveloped' and thus, are in need of guidance and intervention (Cannella & Viruru, 2003). These beliefs promoted a 'development model' where advanced countries designed and decided the indicators that would 'measure' a country's economic growth, perpetuating the accumulation of capital by countries that were already described as advanced (constructing barriers between those defined as 'First World' and 'Third World' countries<sup>10</sup>), and ignoring the biased assumption

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<sup>10</sup> By 'First' and 'Third World', I will rely on the definition given by Mohanty (2006) where 'First World' is described as European Countries and the United States, and 'Third World' is used as a way of describing a geographical area including Latin America, the Caribbean, sub Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, China, South Africa, and Oceania, as well as people that have historic links with the 'Third World' nations (for example Latino, black, Asian and indigenous people living in countries defined as 'First World')



that these indicators are constructed from a Western point of view. In this sense, the concept Quality is installed as one of these 'objective' indicators of development, and used as a universal concept, obscuring its socially constructed nature.

Gayatri Spivak's work is also recognized as a precursor to, and key player in postcolonial theory. According to Andreotti (2011), she combines a "Marxist critique of capitalism with deconstruction, making capitalism and the distribution of wealth and labour in the world central to her analysis" (p.51). Spivak's work is focused on the deconstruction of postcolonial issues (drawing on the philosophy of Derrida) through mainly two approaches. Firstly, she describes a process of 'negative science' through which she seeks to reveal the strategies and rhetoric behind the narrative of the colonizer (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). In this sense, she looks to unmask the ways in which the colonizer constructs its discourse of hegemony, and how this discourse is put into practice both by colonizer and colonized. Secondly, she also recognizes a more 'affirmative' approach to deconstructing postcolonial issues, that is, by destabilizing the binary characteristics that hegemonic discourses use to maintain and legitimize their power. Thus, an affirmative approach for deconstructing postcolonialism can help in the process of emancipation from the colonizers, as well as preventing the appearance of opposing discourses that seek to 'liberate' the oppressed by ultimately reproducing the values and ideologies they set to challenge. In this sense, there is no 'pure' construction of a colonizer or colonized discourse, as both are constructed in relation to the other, and as such, the way in which they are put into practice is not free of complexities and contradictions, where a possible space for resistance can be found. Specifically, this approach is useful to understanding how a hegemonic discourse used Quality as a pivotal concept in reproducing and/or fostering the inequalities present in the system. Similarly, it can help us to recognize and acknowledge the complex (and sometimes contradictory) nature of its use both by the 'official discourse' and by key actors involved in ECE such as practitioners and children.

Regarding this last point, the writings of Homi Bhabha are also recognised as one of the main influences in the development of postcolonial theory. His work is focused on analysing the complex relationship between colonizer and colonized, especially in terms of the contradictions present in it (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). He describes the relationship between colonizer and colonized as one involving forms of *psychic affect*, for example in terms of desire and/or fear of the Other, which make the relationship an unstable one, involving constant conflict.

For Bhabha, the fact that the colonizer's discourse is built around stereotypes is not a sign of its stability, but rather exists as a form of fracture in the identity of the colonizer which is constantly destabilized by its contradictory responses towards the colonized (Bhabha, 2004; Subedi & Daza, 2008). This is because the colonizer reaffirms the stereotypes through repeating the actions that constructed the stereotype in the first place. Thus, what Bhabha postulates is that the identity of the colonizer is built around an opposition to the colonized, that is, it exists in a relation of dependency to the Other, having to differentiate itself at the same time as it must connect itself to this Other to maintain its identity.

Bhabha describes the process through which the Other constitutes his or her own identity through 'mimicry', which functions as a mode of perpetuating the hegemony of the colonizer's discourse. Through mimicry, the colonized internalizes the values of the colonizer, becoming a sort of 'echo' of the colonizer's culture (Bhabha, 2004). This process takes effect through affective and ideological strategies and thus, becomes an effective tool of colonial power, being even validated by the colonized culture. Nevertheless, this process is not a 'pure' one, because the colonizer seeks to impose in the colonized a hegemonic culture, but at the same time, the colonizer does not want the colonized to become exactly like him. As Bhabha describes, there is a "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 2004, p. 122). In this sense, Bhabha's use of 'mimicry' is also a useful tool to include when thinking about how Quality has become a concept used both by colonizer and colonized, and to be vigilant as to how this complex process of internalization of the hegemonic discourse influences the way Quality is thought of and at times contested.

In brief, postcolonial theory acknowledges not only new forms of imperialism which situate the 'Other' as a colonized culture dominated by those in power (in this case, the 'First World' or the 'developed' world), but it also acknowledges the complexity embedded in the construction of the capitalist/imperialist discourse that sustains these inequalities. In this sense, postcolonial theory is useful to understand in particular, how in Chile, the discourse of neo-liberalism as a form of capitalism is embedded in society, how this discourse is appropriated by those in power, as well as by those who are marginalized by it, which in this case it can be viewed at a global perspective, where Chile is a 'Third World' country that validates a hegemonic international discourse of those in power, and at a local level, where a Chilean elite benefits from this discourse taking upon themselves the role of colonizers in their own country.

Similarly, postcolonial theory also allows me to deconstruct the discourse of ECE and the concept of Quality, as means of reproducing the hegemonic discourse, by analysing how notions of 'objectivity' play an important role in universalising notions of capitalism and neo-liberalism as if they were 'truths', and thus, perpetuating inequalities, and denying other forms of knowledge, and other forms of living. In this sense, using postcolonial theory enables me to not only contest the discourse of Quality in ECE, but it also helps me unveil local forms of knowledge (whether they be embedded in the official discourse, or in the voice of children) that can allow for the promotion of transformation and resistance, though they are always in danger of co-option.

### **4.3 Postcolonial Theory and Early Childhood Education: Colonizing Children through the Quality Discourse.**

Postcolonial theory has opened spaces in educational research, especially in terms of the questioning of certain educational discourses that promote and perpetuate neoliberal ideologies, as well as the critical analysis of issues of power, genre and race inside the school (Moss, 2007b; Subedi & Daza, 2008; Subramanian, 2015). Andreotti (2011) proposes a way in which postcolonial theory can be helpful in the analysis of education and its role in the perpetuation

and/or transformation of unequal societies. She affirms that postcolonial studies can allow for researchers and educators to 'unlearn' their 'epistemological arrogance' by legitimizing different ways of knowing and being, through developing a sense of solidarity. This solidarity allows for a recognition of the 'sameness' of the Other in terms of equal opportunities to develop knowledge, and of the recognition of difference to protect the ability and possibility to disagree, similar to what Bhabha proposes in terms of reconstructing our identities moving past the dichotomy of oppressor-oppressed.

Pacini-Ketchabaw (2010) has contributed to the discussion of postcolonial studies in education, and in particular on how the binary discourse constructed around the ideas of East and West can also be found in the field of ECE where a dualistic form of thinking regarding what is appropriate and inappropriate in terms of practices, interactions and results, is dominant when it comes to evaluating and analysing ECE. This discourse is strengthened by a dominant discourse that shapes the way in which children are viewed by other social groups, and configures what is the 'good' way of being and becoming a child. This form of discourse has left most children outside, especially those coming from minorities or developing countries, and/or those do not match the mould of the white European child.

In ECE, postcolonial theory is useful as it focuses on both the educational discourse of the capitalist/neo-liberal system, but the childhood discourse as well, and how the concepts associated with childhood intertwine with a capitalist discourse, transforming children into measurable subjects-objects that can achieve a level of 'development' through a set of standardized strategies. In this sense, analysing the conceptualisation of Quality in education and in ECE through the lens of postcolonial critique, can help contest the discourse of objectivity discourse embedded in the policies designed in Chile, which ultimately maintain and promote the inequalities of the system.

### **4.3.1 Children at the Centre of the Colonial/Capitalist Discourse**

The construction of the modern concept of childhood can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during which Enlightenment ideals of rational autonomy and human progress were still doggedly promoted, and colonialism and imperialism were in full force (Cannella & Viruru, 2003). During this period of colonization, indigenous people and people of colour were considered explicitly 'inferior' to the white European (male) adults, similar to how children are viewed in this occidental/rationalist form of thinking, that is, as incomplete human beings (Cannella & Viruru, 2003; Sahn, 2016). From this perspective, children are seen in opposition to adults, where their separation and categorization creates a privileged position for adults, as they are considered more 'developed' than children (Cannella & Viruru, 2003; Viruru, 2005).

The developmental assumptions underpinning the modern idea of childhood are problematic. As Cannella and Viruru describe:

Belief in progressive human development authorizes the placement of human beings into hierarchies, positioning people on a continuum between those who are the most advanced, developed, mature, and knowledgeable and those who are immature, innocent, and less logical (...) Although child development is labelled as a kinder, more humane, and just way of treating children, the notion is used to legitimate the regulation of one group by another...the expectation that everyone passes through particular stages creates power for those who are at the so-called advanced levels of those stages. (Cannella & Viruru, 2003, p. 92).

From the perspective of these authors then, children are mainly viewed as inferior humans who need to be regulated by those who are more advanced. In this sense, standardized tools are used to define, describe and control the 'appropriate development' of these incomplete humans, and assuming the inferiority of those who do not abide by this 'universal truths'. Furthermore, developmental psychology has focused on describing the specific tasks and skills a child must achieve throughout different stages of life, and ECE has been designed to promote the achievement of those tasks and skills (Moss, Dillon, et al., 2000; Wood & Hedges, 2016). In this sense, questioning the relationship between developmental stages and ECE (and even more, questioning the idea of developmental stages all together) is seen as a first attempt to challenge the

hegemonic discourse of globalization, and specifically, the neoliberal discourse of standardization, universalization and measurement (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010). Particularly, this approach can also allow for the questioning of concepts such as Quality, in terms of their role in maintaining and reproducing the discourse of standardization, capitalism and colonialism.

According to Cannella and Viruru (2003), ECE has traditionally been beholden to an idealized image of childhood, and the preparation of children to become more 'advanced' humans. For this reason, it is claimed that educational institutions have operated in such a way that enables them to control and monitor the progress of children by teaching them how and what to 'know' (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). As such, it is argued that education can serve a 'colonizing' function, subjecting children through the "physical control of the bodies who are younger [which are] only permitted to engage in sanctioned forms of pleasure, while spaces, times, and distances around them are compartmentalized, centred, scheduled, and separated" (Cannella & Viruru, 2003, p. 115).

Considered in relation to educational reforms in Chile that have focused so heavily in Quality, it could be argued that there has not been a sufficiently reflexive and critical discussion of how this emphasis on Quality may well have fed into a discourse of homogenization, in which children are positioned as incomplete humans. In this sense, the analysis of the Chilean educational system from a postcolonial perspective can allow me to not only question the extent to which a hegemonic neoliberal discourse is embedded in most policies, but also to contest and question this discourse, acknowledging not only the hegemonic discourse from the colonizer's perspective, but the discourse of those considered 'inferior' and positioned in the margins of society, in this case, children.

Researching conceptualisations of Quality in the ECE discourse using a postcolonial lens is relevant, as it allows for a deeper understanding of its connection to hegemonic discourses, highlighting the complexities embedded in the design of ECE policies. This approach enables researchers to understand how social discourses are put into practice and transmitted to children from the beginning of their encounter with educational services. As Viruru (2005)

describes, “dominant ideologies of how children grow and develop have become another of colonialism’s truths that permit no questioning, and that is imposed unhesitatingly upon people around the world for their own good” (p.16). Though the situation may not be quite as dire as Viruru suggests, with a critique of postcolonial hegemonic truths still possible, it becomes apparent how necessary it is to contest these discourses and contrast them to what social actors involved in ECE think regarding these concepts, and how local knowledge interacts with these ideas, relativizing ‘universal’ Quality in this educational stage.

#### **4.4 Postcolonial Feminism as a Lens to Look at Early Childhood Education**

Postcolonial theory can help situate the concept of children and childhood according to the logic of colonial oppression, as children are defined in opposition to adults, and as such, positioned as a marginalized group. It could be argued that by analogous means, women have also been situated as a marginalized group, where dominant definitions of what it means to be or become a woman, were developed during the period of colonialism and enlightenment. Thus, the use of feminist postcolonial theories to analyse the context of ECE and the use of the concept of Quality to reproduce and perpetuate imperialist (capitalist) discourses, can allow me to delve into the complexities of the relation between colonizer and colonized, with a much more enriched approach. It also gathers up within its critical point of view, how ECE practitioners are positioned in a profession that is traditionally dependent on a labour force that is overwhelmingly female

According to Cannella and Viruru (2003), patriarchy and the consequent denigration of women as a concept is consistent with imperialism, as what is defined as the developed human being, coincides with the description of a European white male. Together with notions of universalism, objectivity and rationalism (all associated with men) as ‘the’ way to obtain knowledge, women are considered inferior and at the same time, this conceptualisation was crystalized as if it were an objective truth, disregarding that gender is a socially constructed concept. Similarly, indigenous people and children were also objectified in this way, by setting up hierarchical definitions between colonizers

and colonized. Currently, these distinctions are masked by the ideas of 'citizenship' and individual rights, while remaining strongly in the broader discourse in the form of an imperialist system that privileges white men positioning them in positions of power (Mohanty, 2006).

Even when it comes to criticising these forms of oppression, Western feminists have typically focused on contesting patriarchal discourses, without taking into account their own position as privileged white women from the 'First World', overlooking assumptions such as: 1) the idea that women are a constituted and fixed group of people with the same interests and desires (disregarding any racial, class, ethnicity or even local and personal differences); 2) the notion of universality that can be known through the use of scientific methods (categorizing women according to for example, number of women experiencing a form of oppression); and 3) the idea that there is a unified form of oppression experienced by women, and specifically, 'Third world women' (Mohanty, 2006). These notions risk further removing women to a position of powerlessness and oppression, taking away the possibility of agency, especially when this categorization comes from other women. Similar to how childhood is constituted, women from 'Third World' countries are defined in terms of "underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, rural and urban poverty, religious fanaticism, and 'overpopulation' of particular Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries" (Mohanty, 2006, p.47). Thus, feminist postcolonial theory can allow me to address ECE and the concept of Quality within a perspective that contests all 'universal' assumptions of those groups who are positioned as marginalized. Additionally, it is particularly important for me to include feminist postcolonial theory into the analysis of ECE and the concept of Quality, not only because I can relate to the narrowing definitions of 'Third World women' (being one of them), but also because I can relate to the position of the privileged in terms of my relation to children as an adult. In this sense, my positionality in this study is highly connected to these issues. My decision in this context to adopt an indeterminate position as a researcher greatly influenced the way in which I conducted this investigation (which I will describe in detail in the methodological Chapter).



What feminist postcolonial theory seeks to achieve, is to critique the “political and often patriarchal implications of colonialism, nationalism, fundamentalisms, neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism, global feminism, and [offer] an examination of the gendered workings of power within families, communities, organizations, nations and transnational contexts” (Deepak, 2011, p. 785). It looks to develop a critical standpoint that incorporates the views of the oppressed from a perspective that acknowledges the multiplicity and complexity of subjective experiences (Mohanty, 2006; Schnabel, 2014).

In particular, the ideas of Mohanty (2006) serve me as a useful way to approach this research from a feminist postcolonial perspective. She proposes that the decolonization process involves a series of transformations of personal, community and social structures, which can only be achieved through a collective movement where all subjects take part. For her, this process entails:

Working on many fronts, in many different kinds of collectivities in order to organize against repressive systems of rule. It also means being attentive to small as well as large struggles and processes that lead to radical change (p.4).

Feminist postcolonial theories aim at rethinking patriarchal, heterosexual, colonial, racial and capitalist discourses, understanding the simultaneity of these different forms of oppression, and the importance of incorporating all of them into the process of critique. In this sense, these approaches appear as a useful tool through which it is possible to look at diverse contexts where the hegemonic discourse of capitalism is present.

The field of ECE has particularly been associated with women, as children have been also associated with women in terms of their care. According to Davis, Krieg and Smith (2015), ECE is referred to as a feminised field in that not only most professionals who work in the field are women, but also because the purpose of ECE is associated with feminine actions by parents, professionals, policy makers and the wider society. In this sense, it is relevant to acknowledge how patriarchal and misogynistic discourses are also embedded in ECE, and how they can influence the way children experience their preschool, and how they make sense of their everyday actions.

The ambiguous discourse found in the design of ECE policies where an economic discourse is combined with the need to respect and endorse children's rights raises particular complexities and tensions that need to be taken in to account. In this sense, children are being viewed instrumentally and the initiatives promoted to improve Quality in ECE are often those that explicitly demonstrate future payoffs devaluating the notion of children with rights and as social actors (Vergara, 2014b). In this sense, and as Vergara points out, childhood has "the capacity to symbolically condense political projects, notions of subjects, conceptions of society and the future" (Vergara, 2014b, p. 12) and thus, it becomes essential to analyse ECE policies from a different and critical perspective that allows researchers to deepen their understanding of these discourses.

#### **4.5 Postcolonialism in Latin America: Questioning the Hegemonic Discourse from the Borders**

As Fernando Coronil (2000) argues, most postcolonial studies have been focused on cases of North-European colonialism in Asia and Africa, whereas Latin-America and the Caribbean have occupied a marginal space in postcolonial discussions. In this sense, the history of extermination and subjugation of the indigenous population, as well as the exploitation of natural resources in the continent has been neglected in terms of reflecting on the particularities of colonization in Latin-America and the Caribbean (Quijano, 2000). Nonetheless, a series of authors have developed new approaches to postcolonial studies, focusing on constructing local perspectives.

Before the independence process in North America, the territory occupied by the British Empire was reduced, and thus, many indigenous communities lived in un-occupied land, and had developed commercial relations with the British colonizers, even engaging in military alliances to fight the French colonialists (Quijano, 2000). By contrast, the Latin-American indigenous population was either exterminated or forced to perform unpaid jobs, with the indiscriminate extraction of natural resources and occupation of the territory. In this sense, Latin-American society was built on the basis of slavery and forced labour imposed on

the indigenous and African population, and the independence process from the Colonial rule was led by Hispanic-Americans, not by Amerindians, establishing from the beginning, racial and class differences within the American population (Coronil, 2000).

For Mignolo (2000), the symbolic construction through which Latin-American nations define themselves (the 'imagery', as he describes it, using the ideas of Glissant) is not only constituted by the colonial discourse, but also from the internal differences and the responses (or lack of them) of the communities towards the colonization process. This in turn, obscures the conflictive nature of the colonial process within the colonized territories, and transforms the history of the modern world into a universal and unilateral story told by those in power. As he claims:

The imagery of the modern/colonial world arose from the complex articulation of forces, of heard and muted voices, of compact of fractured memories, of stories told from one side suppressing other memories, and from stories told from the double consciousness that the colonial difference generates (Mignolo, 2000, p. 39).

For Mignolo, with the use of the image of 'Western Hemisphere', a 'double consciousness' was established, in which creoles in America descending in part from Europeans were included as part of the modern-colonial world, while at the same time remaining on the 'outside' of modernity. In this sense, America becomes defined by its difference as well as its sameness, in relation to its connection to Europe. Thus, the white creole population of America associated itself with Europe in a geo-political manner, whilst differentiating themselves from Amerindians and Africans through race consciousness, developing what is called 'internal colonialism'. This colonial difference was then exercised not by the colonizers themselves, but by those in charge of the national reconstruction after the independence processes throughout Latin-America.

The identity of America (both the Hispanic and the British America) was constructed on the idea of homogeneity, where Americans recognized themselves as such, without losing 'Europeanness' but separating themselves from the Amerindians and the African-American population (Mignolo, 2000). In

this sense, the notion of the 'Western Hemisphere' allowed for the development of a shared identity between Europeans and Americans, while at the same time, it promoted the racial and class differentiation amongst the American population as a whole, reproducing the colonial rule from the inside. When analyzing this in the context of Chile, and as described in Chapter 3 of this thesis, the identity of the country was still constructed from the difference-sameness binary, where the examples to follow remained in the European countries and previous colonizers, and where the white creole population of America became both part of the colonizers as well as part of the colonized. Thus, the power relations present in the social context of Chile are complex and at times contradictory, where the differences are highlighted from the inside, and the similarities are sought on the outside.

Within the project of modernity and the construction of this double consciousness, the rationalistic and patriarchal discourse of development was also established in Latin-America as the hegemonic discourse of 'truth'. Here, the State is constituted as the main institution in charge of developing a shared 'scientific' discourse, with collective and 'universal' goals that are imposed on the population in the name of modernity and development (Castro-Gómez, 2000). Thus, policies and laws are designed to become more similar to Europe, reproducing and enhancing racial and class differences from within. Similarly, citizens are defined in terms of how they fit these general and universalised notions of modernity, and the school becomes the place where this citizen is to be formed. In this sense, the use of universal concepts such as Quality can function as a means to include Chileans in modern society, via standardized and hegemonic notions of education, while at the same time, remaining always on the outside of the 'First World'.

By promoting and designing strategies that aim to achieve 'universal' Quality goals, Latin-American societies are apparently included in the hegemonic discourse of capitalism, obscuring the fact that even though they are seen as part of the 'Western Hemisphere', they are still engaged in colonial relations with the 'First World' countries. Additionally, as the hegemonic discourse of rationalistic and patriarchal thinking is imposed, local perspectives as well as local knowledge that does not necessarily align with rational thinking is demoted. This confirms

the difference between 'us' and 'them', as the contradictory results of promoting these 'universal' goals are reflected in the inequalities present in Latin-American contexts, especially for people coming from lower social classes (which in Latin-America is closely related to race and gender).

Looking at these issues from a feminist postcolonial perspective, Latin-American authors have also discussed how it is possible to develop critical analyses of the current social system, creating spaces of resistance from the borders, that is, by acknowledging the 'double consciousness' present in Latin-American societies through the 'exotization' of the Other, and the 'occidentalism' of our culture at the same time (Suárez Navaz, 2008). In this sense, our identity relies and depends on how the Colonizers define themselves and vice versa. Thus, it is necessary to be aware of this interdependence, paying attention to our double consciousness, creating bridges that allow for local perspectives to be constructed from within this situation of interdependence. By including issues of race, gender and class among others, it is possible to deconstruct this double consciousness, looking to understand the complexity of the postcolonial discourse present in Latin-America, as well as the tensions that arise from it, and how such tensions can become an opportunity to resist and to construct local knowledge.

Specifically, the use of a Latin-American feminist and postcolonial perspective is useful as it allows me to understand the socio-historic context of education in Chile, and how the concept of Quality can be analysed as a symbol of the way in which Chile is situated both inside as well as outside the idea of the 'modern' world, and how the conceptualisation of Quality reflects the complexities and tensions of such position within the postcolonial system.

## 4.6 Summary of Chapter

Questioning the discourse of Quality in ECE in Chile with a critical approach that takes into account postcolonial theory becomes relevant, especially when most of the local research that attempts to critically analyse educational policies, focuses on the reproductive aspect of the system from a theoretical perspective (Adlerstein, 2012; Brunner, 1979; Valenzuela et al., 2008) with fewer researchers aiming to analyse how these power relations and dominant discourses are put into practice, and how social actors can contribute to resist these inequalities. Similarly, postcolonial theory has been developed mostly in European and North American contexts, and it becomes relevant to develop a more local approach that not only recognizes the power of specific hegemonic ideologies in the Chilean context, but also enhances the role that local actors play in its resistance. Thus, even though it is important to take into account how the key tenets of postcolonial theory have been developed, it is necessary to acknowledge that these perspectives need to be carefully discussed and questioned, including the socio-historical context of what is being analysed. Therefore, my research addresses these issues from a local perspective, including the particularities of the Chilean context and the voices of children involved in ECE, analysing not only the hegemonic discourse present in ECE policies but also local discourses constructed by actors involved in a preschool institution in Chile.

## **PART III. THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

## Chapter 5. Methodological Framework

### 5.1 Introduction

When inscribing oneself<sup>11</sup> as a social researcher, it is necessary to acknowledge that any methodological design is embedded and influenced by the values, ideologies and epistemological stances that the researcher has. Thus, the methodology defined for a specific research is not at all neutral, rather, it has a political and ideological standpoint that relates ultimately to the research questions, and how these questions came to be in the first place. Additionally, the research design is also influenced by the lived experiences of the researcher as well as the formal context in which the researcher is involved.

Drawing from this perspective, as a researcher, it is important that I describe my positionality for this study, as it guided my investigation in every stage of the process. My research inscribes itself in a specific educational context in Chile, focusing on how ECE in Chile is described, how the conceptualisation of Quality has been constructed and positioned within the official discourse, and how such conceptualisation influences and is influenced by the conceptualisations children have regarding their experience in ECE, promoting and/or resisting inequalities developed by a neoliberal ideology prevalent in the country. Similarly, my positionality for this study was influenced as well by the theoretical approach I assumed, that is, postcolonial theory (with a feminist postcolonial perspective). As such, my positionality becomes even more relevant to describe in terms of how I addressed relations of power within the present research.

In this section, I will describe firstly, where my research can be positioned in terms of the epistemology behind it, in this case, an interpretive and critical approach to social research. Following this, I will describe the overall research question and the complementary questions that guided my research, as well as the theoretical background that I used to develop a critical standpoint. Then, I will describe my

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<sup>11</sup> As this research study is designed from a perspective that includes me as a critical researcher, recognizing my positionality within the investigations and thus, speaking in the first person to describe the methodology is coherent with the structure of this thesis.



positionality towards this research and how I located myself as a researcher and individual in this investigation. Lastly, I will describe the specific methodology used in this research as well as the methodological procedure developed.

## **5.2 An Interpretive Paradigm with a Critical Perspective**

Every research process is embedded within a series of beliefs and ideologies pertaining to how the world functions and how we view reality, and thus, how we experience and analyse it. Specifically, a researcher needs to acknowledge the paradigm from which she or he is standing when approaching a particular phenomenon, and how this paradigm will influence the way she or he will conduct research.

I designed and developed this research from an interpretive/constructionist paradigm. The interpretive approach refers to the idea that no research project can be defined as 'objective'. Interpretive research can be understood under the presupposition that we live in a world that can be interpreted from multiple perspectives, and thus, what is relevant is not the matter of objectivity when investigating such world, but rather the process of sense-making. It is posited that knowledge is acquired through interpretation and this knowledge is necessarily subjective, influenced by the lived experiences of the researcher (e.g. family and social background, race, gender, experience, among others) (Yanow, 2000).

For Lincoln, Lynham & Guba (2011), several features can be mentioned when describing the interpretive/constructionist paradigm which appear to be useful to illustrate the overall approach of my research. Firstly, an interpretive/constructionist paradigm assumes what some might describe as a relativist posture where reality is constructed from multiple points of view that are socially and intersubjectively mediated. Similarly, epistemologically speaking, knowledge is always subjective and requiring of an interactive process of construction of meaning between 'enquired' and 'enquirer', assuming that one cannot separate oneself from whatever it is we are intending to understand and/or know. In terms of methodology, the interpretive approach uses a dialectical and

hermeneutic process that seeks to generate a shared interpretation of a specific phenomenon, where knowledge is constituted by co-constructions. Thus, what is relevant for an interpretivist perspective has to do with meanings, whether they be shared or not, and the dialogues that can be created amongst such meanings. Lastly, interpretive research focuses on the multiple voices present in the social world, and how to reconstruct and co-construct meaning taking all of these often divergent perspectives into account (Lincoln et al., 2011).

Interpretive research uses all kinds of data to understand these meanings and interpretations, and thus, employs a wide range of gathering tools. In this sense, an interpretivist approach in research seeks to acknowledge the subjectivity of the accounts of reality a researcher can offer, and thus, to establish a form of research that tells a particular story of how the researcher interprets this reality according to his/her own epistemological and ideological assumptions (Willis, 2007). Similarly, Denzin describes the process of data interpretation as an 'art' where the fieldworker can only begin to understand and interpret the information gathered once he or she gets involved with the data, including multiple perspectives into the text (Denzin, 1984).

Adopting an interpretivist framework, I as a researcher assumed that the knowledge of reality and the human condition is a social construction which can be discovered by researchers through interpretation of the discourse, revealing multiple realities rather than a single objective one (Yanow, 2000). Thus, my research was focused on generating a deep understanding of different discourses (the official discourse of Quality, and children's discourse of their ECE experience) embedded in the context of ECE in Chile, and how these discourses interact and influence each other in the construction of a specific reality, taking place in the everyday practice of a preschool institution.

As I describe my approach as an interpretive/constructionist one, I consider my research to include a critical perspective. The critical research approach I adopted is based on the ideas of critical theorists, who are interested in analysing and confronting power interests between groups and subjects (Apple, Ball, & Gandin, 2010; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), where some groups become more

privileged than others through a series of relations that can either reproduce and maintain these differences, or resist and transform them.

Critical theory draws on multiple theoretical perspectives that go from a 'pure' Marxist approach, to poststructuralist, critical race theory and feminist research approaches, to Latin-American emancipatory theories (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Thus, it is very difficult to describe in detail each of these critical traditions without risking a superficial analysis. Nonetheless, what the majority of critical theorists have in common (as critical theory involves numerous authors and thus, numerous perspectives that can even be put in conflict when analysed in their particularities) is the following argument: that thought is mediated by relations of power that have been constituted throughout history, and as such, the description of facts cannot be removed from the ideologies, discursive constructions or relations of power embedded in them (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). Similarly, critical researchers assume that the relationship between objects and concepts is always mediated by social relations (which are influenced, for some, by a capitalist view of production and consumption), and that meaning is built through language. Taking these aspects into account then, critical theory and critical researchers believe that certain groups are more privileged than others in terms of the concepts that have been subjectively defined by the power structures, and that this privilege is constantly reproduced by those in power, as well as those who are subordinate to that power, including agents of mainstream research (Kincheloe et al., 2011). For critical researchers, the aim of investigating social phenomena has to do with the intention of studying social structures developed throughout history, the relations established between freedom and oppression, power and control (Kincheloe et al., 2011).

As argued in Chapter 4, postcolonial theory informed my theoretical background for this research. Concisely put, postcolonial theory focuses on the critical analysis of neo-colonial discourses that have been developed within a globalized culture, and how these hegemonic ideologies can be contested in order to promote social change. It also seeks to establish social change through specific strategies, that position individuals as active participants in the construction of their social context. In this sense, using a postcolonial perspective allowed me to

engage in critical research by using a specific lens through which I analysed the socio-historical context on Chile, how it has influenced the way ECE policies are designed, and how the concept of Quality is used by the hegemonic discourse, acting as a pivotal concept within neo-colonial perspectives on education and ECE in particular.

The use of an interpretive approach with a postcolonial perspective allowed me to engage in a reflexive process that took into account the specific cultural, economic, political and social context in which Chile is embedded, analysing how the concept of Quality is described by the 'official discourse'. Additionally, the use of postcolonial theories enabled me to develop a critical analysis of the conceptualisations constructed by children about their experience of ECE, linking it to the official discourse, and critically analysing both the tensions and differences between the 'colonizer' and the 'colonized', as well as the complexities embedded in their relationship. Thus, using postcolonial theory became a useful tool to not only analyse the broader social context of ECE in Chile, but also to reflect on the particular experiences of a preschool institution, incorporating local knowledge to contest the hegemonic discourse present in Chile.

Currently, different paradigms co-exist in the world of research, and even though, many of them could be seen as having diverging ideas in relation to how they view the world, nowadays, several paradigms are beginning to 'interbreed' in a way that informs research in a more complex and genuine manner (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 164). In this sense, it is possible to engage research from one viewpoint, incorporating another paradigm where "borrowing seems useful, richness-enhancing, or theoretically heuristic" (p.100). Thus, using an interpretive/constructionist approach can allow for incorporating a critical perspective as well, drawing on some of the corollaries of critical theory and research. Interpretive and critical research share aspects that can become fluid in terms of influencing and informing each other. As Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg (2011) propose, interpretive and critical research are often commensurable in terms of sharing a belief in the subjective nature of knowledge, which is constructed through social relations. Similarly, both paradigms share a

participatory approach to research, often incorporating the voice of key actors into what is analysed, and both perspectives emphasise in the potential of research as an emancipatory tool, whether it be through direct strategies embedded in the research process, or as a long-term commitment towards emancipation processes.

In sum, I engaged in research from an interpretive paradigm, acknowledging the subjectivity of knowledge and its construction through social relations, but at the same time, recognizing the historical relations that have been developed by those in power, specifically when it comes to analysing the history of Chile in terms of social and political changes imparted over the last 50 years. As Chile is an example of one of the most radical attempted implementations of a neoliberal system (Klein, 2007), it is important that the power structures established during that time are taken into account when analysing the lived experiences of key actors involved in ECE, as they are still in force and influence the way ECE is designed and defined. Thus, I was interested in not only understanding how a concept such as Quality is embedded in the discourse of ECE and in the interactions, present in an ECE institution, but also in relating these with broader aspects such as power relations developed through a neoliberal ideology, and how such relations influence and sometimes render opaque alternative visions of how ECE could be thought of. I believe that engaging in such manner can allow me to more deeply understand the conceptualisations of Quality in a particular setting, and at the same time, understand how a dominant shared meaning of the concept is perpetuated and/or contested and resisted through everyday practices. Additionally, in terms of my positionality, it was necessary that I acknowledged the social structures present in my country, specifically in terms of the neoliberal system implemented during the dictatorship and its consequences in the design of public policy in education, and ECE in particular.

Based on this approach, I used a form of qualitative methodology to address my research questions, taking into account an interpretive framework that incorporates aspects of critical research as well. Thus, this particular methodology allowed me to analyse the discourse of Quality in ECE in Chile in a profound and detailed manner, looking to understand how key actors involved in

ECE influence and are influenced by this discourse, in a particular setting (Merriam, 2009; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Similarly, I aimed to comprehend the context of an ECE institution in its uniqueness, critically analysing the way specific definitions of Quality can construct, reproduce and/or resist the inequalities present in Chilean society, reflected on the educational policies in ECE that use such terms as the basis of their design. Additionally, I aimed to analyse this conceptualisations, incorporating the social context and specific discourses present in Chile into the analysis, and engaging with the participants in the research process (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

### **5.3 Research Questions**

To focus my research on the analysis of the conceptualisation of Quality in ECE in Chile and how it is constructed, and how children participating in a Chilean preschool are involved in its construction, I developed a series of research questions that allowed me to structure the research process.

As I mentioned previously, these research questions arise from a specific political, ideological and epistemological standpoint that is also influenced by my experiences as a Chilean woman living during a hectic period of time in my country. As such, my questions came to be as part of an ongoing problematization of how ECE policies were being designed and implemented, especially when immersing myself in ECE contexts as part of my previous work in the Ministry of Education.

The concept of Quality is frequently used and at times, perhaps overused, by academics, politicians, educators and families in general. Nevertheless, there is little information as to what we mean when we refer to Quality, and how we should address its definition, as well as how it is possible to achieve this objective of Quality in education (if possible at all). Thus, it became relevant for this researcher to understand how the conceptualisation of Quality is constructed by the 'official' discourse, and how key actors, and specifically children, conceptualize the experience of preschool (and how Quality as a concept is

embedded or not in such experience). Particularly, it was of great interest to me, to be able to understand how children construct their ECE experience from their own perspective as participants of a preschool setting, and how their voices can be incorporated into the discussion and questioning of the discourse of Quality, incorporating the meaning making process developed by children, positioning them as active social actors. As such, I have developed the following questions:

a) Main Question

*What are the conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile present in the official discourse of stakeholders, and how do these conceptualisations influence and are influenced by the conceptualisations given by children participating in an ECE classroom in relation to their preschool experience?*

b) Complementary Questions

1. How is the official discourse of Quality in ECE in Chile constructed by stakeholders?
2. How do children in this study construct meaning in relation to their ECE experience in a Chilean preschool?
3. What are the commonalities, differences and tensions present between the conceptualisations of Quality constructed by stakeholders, and how children construct meaning in relation to their ECE experience?

Thus, my main question focused on the interrelation between the development of an official discourse around the concept of Quality, and the conceptualisation children have of their experience in an ECE institution. In particular, I aimed to understand how all actors involved construct meaning, and how such constructions relate to each other, and how they contribute to the reproduction and/or resistance of inequalities present in Chile.

## 5.4 Qualitative Methodology as bricolage

Qualitative research can be described as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3), that is, a practice that seeks to make the world visible through the interpretation of everyday interactions in natural settings. Qualitative methodologies place an emphasis on understanding processes and meanings, including how the relationship between researcher and what is researched is developed, and how it influences the understanding of the phenomena studied. The value-laden nature of research is not only recognized but appreciated as an important aspect of the investigative process. In this sense, the position of the researcher as a partial interpreter is acknowledged, and the preconceptions that are put into practice when conducting research are made explicit and used as a framework from which the analysis is situated.

### ***5.4.1 Researchers as Bricoleurs: Untangling the Complexities of Social Processes***

Denzin and Lincoln use the concept of ‘bricolage’ to describe the process of researching within qualitative methodology, reflecting on the appearance of new paradigms that confront traditional forms of researching. As the authors argue:

The qualitative researcher who uses montage is like a quilt maker or a jazz improviser. The quilter stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together. This process creates and brings psychological and emotional unity to an interpretive experience. [Bricolage researchers] move from the personal to the political, the local to the historical and the cultural. These are dialogical texts. They presume an active audience. They create spaces for give and take between reader and writer. They do more than turn the other into the object of the social science gaze (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 5).

In this sense, a bricolage approach allows researchers to not only recognize but also to use the complexities and contradictions present in the studied phenomena, acknowledging that all research entails interpretations that need to take into account the social and historical context in which each subject present in the research process (whether it be participant of the study or an investigator) is embedded (Kincheloe, 2001; Santaella, 2016). Thus, the use of multiple perspectives (epistemological, theoretical, methodological, analytical, etc.) is not



only useful but necessary, to add richness and depth to the investigation. As Kincheloe (2001) describes:

Any social, cultural, psychological, or pedagogical object of inquiry is inseparable from its context, the language used to describe it, its historical situatedness in a larger ongoing process, and the socially and culturally constructed interpretations of its meaning(s) as an entity in the world (p.682).

The 'bricoleur' then, needs to reflect on all the aspects mentioned by Kincheloe, recognizing the socially constructed nature of the interpretive process of research. Denzin and Lincoln describe five dimensions where the 'bricoleur' puts bricolage into practice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Rogers, 2012). Firstly, the interpretive 'bricoleur' engages in a reflexive process that acknowledges the positionality of the researcher and thus, includes different perspectives into the inquiry, recognizing the complexity of the context from which the researcher is approaching a subject of study. In this sense, my approach to the investigation acknowledges my positionality as a Latin-American woman coming from a Chilean context (as I will explain in detail in this Chapter), incorporating my ideological and political stance as one of the lenses through which I looked at the concept of Quality in ECE. Secondly, the 'bricoleur' is also a methodological entity, in that she or he uses multiple tools to gather information and seek meaning-making, adapting, modifying and changing such gathering tools according to what the context dictates. As such, my research also incorporated a methodological bricolage, adapting the tools designed previously to the specific context of a Chilean ECE institution, in order to gain understanding and depth in the recollection of data that would be significant and useful to the analysis of the conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile. Additionally, I also incorporated innovative and participatory methods to listen to children's voices, adapting research to how children experience preschool and privileging their own forms of communicating such experiences.

Thirdly, the theoretical 'bricoleur' engages in a reflexive process that includes multiple theoretical approaches to analysing one phenomenon (Rogers, 2012). In this sense, the use of postcolonial theory incorporating feminist perspectives allows me to engage in a critical analysis of the concept, working from different angles and including various perspectives into the process. Fourthly, political 'bricoleurs' aim to produce knowledge that comes from those who are being silenced by those in power, looking to develop counter-hegemonic ways of researching. In this sense, I aimed at listening to children, understanding and interpreting their preschool experience by acknowledging their ways of communicating. Lastly, the narrative 'bricoleur' recognizes that any text only represents one perspective and interpretation of a social phenomenon, and thus, they seek to make explicit the beliefs and discourses that lie behind such interpretations.

As a researcher, I aimed to include ideas and conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile, both coming from those who participated in the study as well as my own. Similarly, I included an exploration of the historical and social processes that influence such conceptualisations, constructing an interpretation of how the concept of Quality is embedded in the official discourse, and how such a concept influences the ways in which children make meaning of their experience in preschool. This interpretation included several viewpoints (the official discourse, children, my own positionality) that constructed a dialogue informed by feminist postcolonial theory, as well as diverse methods to gather information.

Bricolage incorporates the idea of multidisciplinary, which can be criticized by arguing that it leads to a superficial approach to research. Thus, it is important to understand that what bricolage seeks to do is to build a bridge between disciplines, starting by understanding the workings of each perspective, and then piecing them together in the most useful and comprehensive manner in order to develop a level of in-depth interpretation in research (Kincheloe, 2001). In relation to this, rigour in the research process of this investigation was achieved by the use of multiple perspectives that have been carefully included, acknowledging how social and historical contexts influence the way I as a researcher constructed a particular interpretation of the phenomenon studied.

Positioning myself as a 'bricoleur', I could also design my research considering different paradigms and theoretical perspectives such as the interpretive and critical approach, utilising those aspects that could be brought into conversation between each other and inform the investigation. Additionally, a 'bricolage' perspective allowed me to shed light on my positionality, as this perspective recognizes that "any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12), and that any observation or reflection is embedded in a socially constructed world, where one's own positionality influences and is influenced by what is observed. In relation to this, it becomes relevant to firstly describe my positionality in order to contextualize my research, and the decisions I made.

## **5.5 Case Study and contextual analysis**

As my main research strategy, I chose to do a case study of a particular setting, that is, a classroom within a preschool education institution in Chile. I chose this strategy because it allowed me to gather information to answer the specific research questions I developed in a more in depth manner (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993), maintaining an approach that privileged a focused analysis of everyday experiences in a local context, and highlighting the conceptualisation children have about the concept of Quality in ECE in Chile. Using a bricolage case study approach to qualitative research allows for the investigator to design a method strategy that includes different types of data gathering tools, in a fluid context that permits the adaptation and change of strategies according to how the research unfolds. Similarly, case studies are often used by qualitative researchers who adopt an interpretive approach as this strategy is useful to developing a deep understanding of a particular setting, and to get embedded in the lived experiences of key actors (Willis, 2007; Yanow, 2000). A case study privileges the analysis of the lived experiences of key actors within a local context, and the subjective nature of such analysis and interpretation.

In particular, the use of a case study allowed me to analyse how different relations operate in a particular Chilean ECE setting; how different meanings and discourses interact with each other in that setting; and how this interaction influences the way in which the discourse of Quality in ECE is defined, and how social inequalities present in the broader social system can be constructed, reproduced and/or resisted through the use of specific conceptualisations. Moreover, a case study approach allowed me to understand how a particular ECE institution functions in its everyday practice (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Additionally, it allowed me to reflect on how the concepts and meanings present in that setting interact with the ones described by the 'official discourse', confronting and questioning the way in which this discourse comes to exist and maintain itself as dominant. Additionally, the use of a case study also made it possible for me as a researcher to become embedded in the context not only as an outsider but as part of that community, allowing me to understand more deeply the way in which interactions take place, and to acknowledge and incorporate my own experience within that context into the research process. Moreover, the possibility of engaging myself in everyday activities with both children and adults, greatly influenced the way in which I conducted the activities designed for the fieldwork. This was not only in terms of adapting such activities to fit the specific context in which I was working, but also as in engaging in a reflexive process of constantly questioning my positionality and the implications of developing research from an interpretive approach.

The case study was constituted by an ECE classroom of children aged between 3 and 4 years old, in a preschool institution in Chile. In order to choose a case that allowed me to answer the research questions proposed in the best way possible (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009), I selected a preschool from one of the two main public services that provide ECE (Integra Foundation and JUNJI). These two institutions develop their programs based on the guidelines of the Chilean State regarding ECE (private institutions, by contrast, do not have the obligation to follow these guidelines), and have been working together in the setting of landmarks for the next years. In addition, both these institutions work with children coming from the three most vulnerable quintiles of the population (Dirección de Presupuestos, 2008; Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2013). As such, the children

in this study are also part of an overall disadvantaged social group in Chile, which becomes important for the following analysis of their experiences and its relation to how Quality is defined by the 'official discourse'. This is pertinent because most of the policies developed during the last years in Chile have focused on reducing inequalities in the system through initiatives targeting this population, specifically through the fostering of programs that promote Quality and Equity in ECE. The selection of an ECE preschool belonging to one of these institutions allowed me to contrast the 'official' Quality discourse, with the everyday interactions of children inside a classroom.

The participants involved in this school-based case study were: the head teacher of the preschool, the classroom teaching assistant and teacher, the children within the classroom, and the parents of the 5 children selected to participate in the activities described below. Initially, interviews were conducted with the head teacher, the practitioner and the teaching assistant, as well as the parents of the children participating in the specific activities within the classroom. However, taking into account that one of the purposes of the thesis was to understand children's perspectives on their ECE experience, as well as time and budget constraints that did not enabled me to analyse all of the information collected during the fieldwork process, it was decided not to include the data gathered through parents, practitioners and the teaching assistant into the analysis process. In this sense, the strategic decision of not included such data reflected the overall focus of the research questions which were aimed at understanding children's views on their experience of preschool education. Given this focus, it was a priority to develop a more nuanced perspective of children's voices, rather than include all of the actors involved in the data gathering process.

Even though there is still little research aiming at understanding practitioners' perspectives of Quality of ECE in Chile (Pardo & Woodrow, 2014), where the focus has been generally set on evaluating practitioners' practices with regard to Quality standards (See for Example Treviño et al., 2013; and Pizarro & Espinoza, 2016), recent studies have included practitioners' views and perspectives relating ECE. For instance, Bravo & Morales (2012) developed a descriptive research project which included practitioners' self-evaluation of their professional

development, their expectations and beliefs about children's learning, and levels of work satisfaction. Similarly, Huaiquián, Mansilla-Sepúlveda, and Lasalle-Rivas (2016) analysed practitioners' representations regarding the concept of 'attachment', and the way they value it in terms of developing child-adult relationships within the preschool setting. In relation to the how practitioners construct meaning around childhood, Martínez-Núñez & Muñoz-Zamora (2015) aimed at understanding practitioners' childhood 'imaginaries' through the use of in depth interviews and prospectus sheets with last year preschool teaching students. On the other hand, almost no research including children's perspectives has been conducted in Chile during recent years, and if it has, their opinions have been included in larger studies where ultimately, adult discourses are taken more into account than that of children (See for example Centro de Políticas Comparadas en Educación, 2015). Thus, the decision to focus on children's perspectives was based on the lack of investigations developed in the country around this issue, and the need to develop a more complex understanding of the experience of ECE, taking into account not only adults' views but also including the voice of those who are the direct beneficiaries of ECE, that is, children.

Even though the aim of this thesis was to delve into children's views of their preschool experience, not including practitioners' and teaching assistants' views on ECE and Quality affected the way in which I was able to understand some of the participating children's perspectives on their experience regarding their preschool setting, especially taking into account the central role that practitioners have in how children constructed meaning about such experience, as well as how important their role was in the "official discourse" analysed in this thesis. In this sense, including other key actors' views on preschool would have enriched my understanding of the participating children's perspectives both in terms of how they relate to other actors' meanings, but also in how their experiences are constructed in interaction to other stakeholders' experience around ECE. I will return to this issue in the Discussion Chapter of this thesis.

Interactions between the participating children and the practitioner and teaching assistant were also analysed, with a focus on how children in the classroom experienced such interactions. I included a selection of children from two different levels: the general classroom, which was included as part of the context of the case selected; and a smaller group of 5 children, who were involved in the study in more depth. I used participatory approaches to understand their conceptualizations of Quality in ECE, with the purpose of including children's perspectives through different strategies that allowed them to express their views and opinions, using different forms of communication. Specifically, the classroom included 25 children aged between 3 and 4 years old<sup>12</sup>, the practitioner, and the teaching assistant.

### ***5.5.1 Research with Children***

As my approach towards this study was to understand how the official conceptualisation of Quality interacts with children's meaning-making of their preschool experience, I worked from the stance that children constitute a social group in themselves, where they act as active members of society with their own views, ideas and beliefs about the world they live in. As such, children can contribute to transform as well as reproduce the inequalities present in their context (a perspective known as 'new sociology of childhood') (Corsaro, 2005; Mayall, 2002). Drawing from this perspective, it is possible then to study power relations and inequalities present in the interaction between children and parents, children and teachers, and ultimately, children and the broader society. Thus, including children's voices in the construction of meanings can promote reflections related to such power relations, opening spaces for further critique and transformation (Corsaro, 2005).

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<sup>12</sup> The number of children attending the preschool varied largely throughout the year, especially during the Winter period (June, July and August), where attendance was very low (between 8-15 children per day).

What the 'new sociology of childhood' posits, is that children, as any other social group, are both constrained by the social structure as well as producing it through social practices, and influencing the way society is shaped. In this sense, children are able to transform their contexts and also contribute to the reproduction of inequalities in the system, particularly in terms of their positioning as a minority social group (James & James, 2008; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). Additionally, they exercise their agency by understanding the rules of the culture in which they are immersed, being influenced by their knowledge of it, their interaction with others and their behaviours (Wood, 2014). Within this perspective, children are seen as equally capable of constructing their own interpretations of their social world, and as such, a specific methodology is required to understand their lives and experiences.

Methods for including children's voices have been developed within this perspective. An indicative selection includes work by Clark and Moss (2011), Christensen and James (2000), Fisher and Wood (2012), Mayall (2002), and Nutbrown & Clough (2009). What unites these studies, is the fact that they are greatly influenced by the participatory research approach, relying on more imaginative tools that allow children to actively participate in investigation (O'Kane, 2000). Broadly speaking, participatory research with children can be divided in four categories (see Holland, Renold, Ross & Hillman, 2010), that is:

- a) research where children are invited to participate but do not get involved in any of the phases of the study, for example in traditional semi-structured interviews or via questionnaires, among others;
- b) research focused on 'child-centred' forms of communication with children such as art, play, games and the use of visual methods like videos and photographs;
- c) research where children are encouraged to participate in aspects of the research design and/or analysis, focusing on areas that directly affect them (for example, views on their everyday life, their schools, among others);
- and, d) research that trains children in research methods and includes them as co-researchers during the entire process.



This study was designed with a participatory approach similar to the second categorization, where children were actively engaged in the data gathering process by utilizing visual methods that allowed them to communicate in a more fluid manner, acknowledging that the relationship between the adult researcher and the children is always complex. In this sense, As Holland et al. describe:

Power in child–adult relations is theorized as both a productive and repressive force (...) It can operate to constrain and empower in different sociocultural contexts. Most importantly, it is not something that exists ‘out there’ but always in relation as a social and discursive phenomenon. (Holland, Renold, Ross & Hillman, 2010, p.362)

Thus, my research design focused on the idea of ‘responsible knowing’, based on the principles of attentiveness, responsiveness, competence and responsibility (Tronto, 1993) towards children’s voices and their participation in the study. This approach reflects how I, as a researcher, attempted to effectively listen to children’s experiences and how I interpreted and represented their perspectives (especially by using visual methods). As I did so, I took into account the power relations established between me as an adult researcher, and children as active agents of their social context.

Visual methods have been used to address different themes with children, not only to include them as active participants in the research process, but also, to approach their thoughts and beliefs by using different forms of language that do not necessarily relate to the ones used by adults (Barker & Weller, 2003; Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell, 2014). Similarly, visual methods such as photographs and drawings have also been implemented in qualitative research with a critical and interpretive approach. They have been used as a way of giving importance to the intersubjective relation between the research subject and the data itself, allowing for the participants to speak through different strategies, and the researcher to reflect on his/her own position within the research process. As Newman, Woodcock and Dunham propose, “It is essential to allow children to ‘represent’ themselves. Representation is a central element through which meanings are constructed, understood, and shared” (2006, p. 290). Thus, the use of photographs and drawing allows children to represent their experiences using a language that is more familiar to them, without restricting their opportunity to

express themselves, as well as giving them partial control to choose the way in which they will contribute to the study (Derbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005).

Using visual methods to engage children in the research process also allows them to have an opportunity to tell their own story, to give a unique version of what they think with their own perspective (Newman et al., 2006; Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell, 2014). Thus, the use of different methods to collect information for this research, also included a constructivist/interpretivist perspective where the images (as well as the spoken word) represent a particular experience, interpreted by the participant and the researcher in a partial and subjective manner. However, as my research also incorporated postcolonial and feminist perspectives, it is important to acknowledge that even though the use of participatory strategies to include children's experiences of preschool is relevant, the complexities of the context in which children were immersed (that is, a context where adults design and implement the majority of the activities, and children occupy a subordinate position in a highly hierarchical setting) could also affect the way in which children were included in the research process as well as how their points of view were influenced by the adult discourse. Nonetheless, despite the complexities mentioned, visual methods have been used as a way of decolonizing research methodologies and dominant narratives within qualitative research, by allowing those who have been marginalized to express their views and have their voices heard (Kaomea, 2003). As such, the use of photographs and drawings also accounts for an attempt to research with children in a way that does not encapsulate their participation in a dominant form of enquiry, rather it aims at allowing them to express themselves in whatever form they choose. Thus, it also aims at listening to children's perspectives, acknowledging the social structures and constraints that may appear within the preschool context, but also developing freer spaces where children can communicate in diverse manners, recognizing the complexity of their discourse as well.

In outline, I developed a strategy including the use of photographs, drawings, and informal conversations with the children involved, in addition to the observations developed in the classroom, strategies that will be described in detail in the following methodological section.

### ***5.5.2 Untangling the Official Discourse***

The case study approach adopted in this research was carefully augmented by a contextual analysis of the official conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile. This analysis included a series of interviews with key stakeholders in relation to the development of educational policies in Chile and in ECE, which will be described in detail in the following section of this Chapter. These interviews allowed me to position my case study within the broader institutional and political context, and thus, to develop an in-depth interpretation of the concept of Quality in ECE and how it is defined. In this sense, my approach seeks to not only understand how a particular setting conceptualizes Quality and how their lived experiences influence and are influenced by such conceptualisations, but also to acknowledge the social structures present in the context and the historical processes that led to a specific conceptualisation of Quality in ECE in Chile.

Along with the interviews held with the stakeholders, I also engaged in a systematic study of official documents such as the Early Childhood Education bill which was enacted on April 28<sup>th</sup> of 2015, and the General Law of Education as part of my overall strategy (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2010, 2015), to investigate the context in which the ECE classroom is embedded, and to construct a more robust idea of the 'official discourse' of Quality in ECE in Chile. The analysis of such documents and interviews will be described in detail in section 5.6.5 of this Chapter.

## **5.6 Methodological Procedures: Multiple Tools for Multiple Perspectives**

I will now describe each of the gathering tools used to collect information in relation to the conceptualisation of Quality within the official discourse, and children's experience towards preschool. Each of the methods used were designed in accordance with the social context in which the research was conducted, and even though most of them were constructed before their application, they were all adapted to serve the best and most useful purpose

within the research process. Additionally, a series of methods were used to contextualize the study, most of them related to identifying the case study, gaining consent/assent from the participants, and developing the fieldwork in the preschool selected.

It is important to describe each of the activities and methods used during the fieldwork as well as the methodological procedure, as this is a complex study conducted within a specific setting and conducted over a relatively long period of time. Thus, the description of the strategies used does not only reflect the methodology employed but also the highly complex context in which the study was developed.

### ***5.6.1 Selecting the Case Study***

As part of an agreement established between myself and CIAE (Centro de Investigación Avanzada en Educación), I developed the fieldwork in Chile with the support of one of their researchers in terms of the methodological aspects involved in my study<sup>13</sup>. This allowed me to contact the ECE institution in a more fluid manner, and present my research to them directly to obtain permission to work in one of their preschools.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the ECE system in Chile has a complex structure, and thus, any attempt at developing research in one of their preschools entails a series of bureaucratic steps to gain permission, and later consent from the participants. Additionally, these severely hierarchical organisations reflect the established power relations between different actors involved in ECE in Chile. Taking this into account, formal authorization was sought in JUNJI to use one of their preschools (one classroom in particular) as a case study for the research project. This process followed the internal guidelines that JUNJI establishes for researchers to work in one of their preschools, which consisted in a first meeting

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<sup>13</sup> This agreement was established between me (with the previous authorization of my supervisor and the School of Education of the University of Sheffield) and Daniela Jadue, one of the investigators of the centre. The official agreement signed by both parties is included in Appendix 2.

with the technical department, explaining the purpose of the study and the different activities to be carried out in the setting; a formal meeting with the regional coordinator in which the preschool would be selected; and a series of formal procedures concerning documentation that proved my membership to the University of Sheffield and my alliance to CIAE, following the signing of a formal agreement between me and JUNJI, in which they authorized me to conduct my research in the preschool selected (see Appendix 1).

Once I established contact with the preschool, a formal meeting was held with the Head Teacher and the Practitioner of the classroom selected. An information sheet was delivered in which the main purpose of the study was explained, alongside the activities to be carried out and the responsibilities of the researcher as well as contact information (see Appendix 6). Following this meeting, both parents as well as the practitioner and the teaching assistant signed informed consents forms after reading the information sheet and asking any pertinent questions regarding the research process (see Appendices 5,6,7,9,10).

It is important at this point to acknowledge that even though this research is embedded within a critical approach that seeks to give voice to those who are generally excluded by the official (and more powerful) discourse, there were a series of restraints present during the methodological procedure that did not allow for a more independent and autonomous way of approaching the participants. This was also considered when collecting the information as well as when analysing and interpreting the data for this study (specially in relation to children's experiences in preschool).

### ***5.6.2 Ethical Guidelines and Procedure***

All of the participants involved in this research study were asked to give their informed consent, following the guidelines given by the University of Sheffield, whose protocols at the same time, follow the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines. These protocols were used because in Chile there are no specific ethical guidelines regarding educational research.

In terms of researching with key adult actors, firstly, policy makers and student movement leaders were informed about the purpose of the research study through an information sheet that explained the objectives, activities to which they would be invited, and all the information regarding responsibilities of the researcher (see Appendix 4). Once they signed the consent form (see Appendix 8), a date and place to conduct the interview were scheduled with each of the participants. The locations for the interviews were chosen by the interviewees, looking to ensure that they felt comfortable throughout the activity, both in terms of privacy as well as geographical distance.

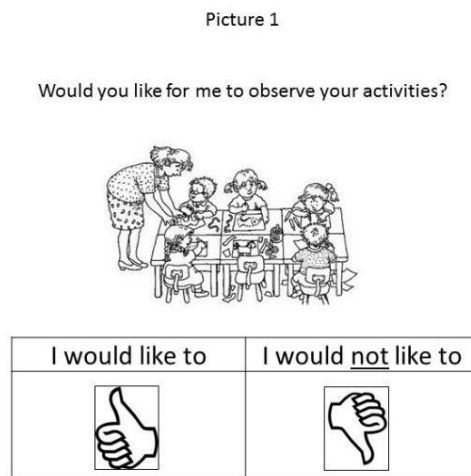
When it comes to researching with children (especially young children) using participatory methods, it is important to take into account several elements during the process of gaining consent, that range from protecting and caring for their safety and well-being, to incorporating them as social actors without ignoring their autonomy and individuality (Clark & Moss, 2011; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). Thus, it was important to constantly question my position as a researcher, and bear in mind potential power relations (whether it be researcher-participant, adult-child or any other). In this sense, I had to acknowledge that power is exercised in context, and that my position as a researcher needed to be defined with the children at all times. Similarly, by acknowledging children's position as active participants of the study and within their preschool experience, it was important to constantly negotiate their willingness to engage in any activity or process within the project (as discussed in Christensen, 2004; Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2007; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). In terms of recognizing the influence of power in this study, it is important to highlight again that, even though activities were designed with a participatory approach, children were not incorporated in the whole research process (such as in the construction of the research questions and the analysis process). Thus, as I mentioned previously, my position as a researcher needed to incorporate an ongoing problematization of I was to include children's experiences, acknowledging their agency, as well as recognizing my position of power within the investigation.

In order to include children's perspectives in the study, I established a series of steps to obtain consent from children, following the recommendations made by Nutbrown and Hannon (2003) in relation to the ethical considerations that need to be taken into account when obtaining consent for researching with young children. Firstly, I designed an information sheet and consent form for parents, in order to seek parental permission. Secondly, I developed protocols that included an explanation of the purpose of the study and the activities in which children would be included, using language that was familiar to children and that allowed them to engage in a discussion about their participation in the project. Thirdly, I waited until every child had given me his/her consent to begin collecting the information from the classrooms. Fourthly, I included in the consent, an explanation that all of the information would be kept confidential, and that their anonymity would be protected from people outside the study. Finally, throughout the whole research process, I remained sensitive and attentive to the children's needs, respecting their times and rhythms, and adapting the activities when necessary (including the activities designed to gain their consent).

In this study, all the children involved were invited to give their on-going informed consent, that is, they were asked frequently about their willingness to participate in each activity and their decision to do so or not was accepted at all times. Additionally, regarding consent from parents and gatekeepers, it was important to develop a close relationship so that they would not feel pressured to participate or to make their children participate (Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). Similarly, it was also important to establish a trusting relationship with the children involved to be able to engage them in a discussion about their preschool without it being overly influenced by their parents or gatekeepers' views. Thus, I first embedded myself in the preschool setting, developing a relationship with the children, the practitioner and the teaching assistant, and then discussed the purposes of the research with them, introducing the children to the main concepts of an investigation and my role as a researcher, and their role as active participants of the data gathering phase of the study, as discussed in Harcourt & Conroy (2011).

All the children gave their informed consent to participate in the recorded observations (see Appendix 11), and verbal consent was asked for each time to corroborate their intention to participate. This procedure was conducted through an activity in which several images were shown to the children to explain their rights in the research process as well as the activities to which they were invited.

Image 5.1 shows an example of Pictures used in informed consent for the classroom:



**Image 5.1** Example of Consent Form.

The previous image is an example of the pictures shown to children in the informed consent activity (translated into English). Regarding the specific book-making activity (outlined below), additional informed consent was asked from children (see Appendix 12). Once the participating children agreed to help me with my research, I asked them what would be the best way in which I could verify that they wanted to participate in the activities they proposed. Once we agreed in one way to establish their form of consent (in general, and then for each activity), we proceeded to “sign” the consent. I also explained to them that they could withdraw from the activities at any time if they wanted to, and that they could also incorporate themselves in the activities even if they said no at first.



In terms of confidentiality, all the information gathered (whether through interviews, observations, recordings, drawings, photographs, among others) was kept confidential and secured at all times, and was only reviewed by me. Similarly, all names were changed to protect anonymity.

### **5.6.3 Gathering Tools: The Official Discourse.**

To analyse how Quality in ECE is conceptualised in the official discourse, I included two sources of information, that is, interviews with key stakeholders involved in the design of public policies in ECE in Chile, and official documents pertaining to ECE. This allowed me to contrast and compare the formal discourse found in legal documents with perceptions and reflections coming from key actors involved in ECE. This also enabled me to identify tensions and contradictions present in the official discourse, as well as in how the use of the concept of Quality was put into practice by different stakeholders.

Specifically, the activities included:

- a) Semi-structured interviews with policy makers and student movement leaders

The main purpose of the interviews with policy makers and social movement leaders was to gather information regarding their conceptualisations concerning Quality in ECE in Chile. The interview covered a range of questions relating to their experience in the field of ECE, their conceptualisation of the key factors involving ECE, their conceptualisation in particular of the concept of Quality in ECE, and their perceptions of Quality in the current context of Chile (for more detail, see Appendix 13).

The interviews were designed to be carried out from November of 2014 to January of 2015, and each of the participants (4 in total) were recruited and interviewed during this period. Firstly, the participants were defined in terms of the institutions in which they worked or had worked in the past. Specifically, the institutions selected referred to those that actively participated in the design and

implementation of ECE policies in Chile (Ministry of Education, JUNJI, Integra Foundation, National Council of Early Childhood, among others). With respect to social movement leaders, the participant was selected in terms of her involvement in the student movement and her knowledge of ECE in Chile. In total, 4 interviews were carried out:

a) Three interviews with policy makers

Maintaining anonymity, here are brief descriptions of each of the three interviewed policy makers:

- One policy maker working in the Ministry of Education, specifically in the area of early childhood education. She was also involved in implementing the ECE reform, and has 20 years of experience in the field of ECE.
- One policy maker who worked in the National Council of Early Childhood and in international organisations involved in childhood issues. She was also involved in designing policies for early childhood and working with public institutions in the country.
- One policy maker working in JUNJI for the last 9 years, involved in designing and developing initiatives to support the work within JUNJI preschools.

b) One interview with a social movement leader:

In relation to the social movement leader, the interviewee was an early childhood education teacher student, directly involved in the student union of The University of Chile, and in the student movement during 2011-2012.

It is important to acknowledge the role of each of the stakeholders interviewed, taking into account the highly bureaucratic structure of the Chilean ECE system in Chile. In this sense, two of the policymakers interviewed were or are currently involved in designing policies at a national level, whilst the third is involved in developing initiatives within a public ECE institution, following national guidelines as well as specific objectives defined by the institution. Lastly, the student movement leader is involved in the critique and questioning of ECE policies within

the broader educational system. How the hierarchical structure is defined and put into practice is a significant issue that arises later on the analysis process, as I will describe later on Chapters 6 and 8.

Some of the main topics addressed in the interviews with policy makers and social movement leaders were:

Main Topics in Interview to Stakeholders	
<b>Policy Makers' Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Field of expertise in ECE of the interviewee.</li> <li>Motivation to work in ECE (relevance of ECE from his/her perspective).</li> </ul>
<b>Student Movement Leader's Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship between student's movement in Chile and the educational system.</li> <li>Main pillars in which the student's movement based its demands.</li> <li>Role of interviewee in the student's movement.</li> <li>Relationship between student's movement and ECE.</li> </ul>
<b>Chilean Context in ECE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current context of Education in Chile, advances and challenges.</li> <li>Relevance of ECE in general.</li> <li>Current context of ECE in Chile, advances and challenges.</li> <li>Pillars of ECE in Chile.</li> </ul>
<b>Quality and Equity in ECE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conceptualization of Quality and Equity in ECE.</li> <li>Evaluation of Quality and Equity in ECE in Chile.</li> <li>Relationship between Quality and Equity and the design of public policies during the last years.</li> <li>Relevance of Quality and Equity in ECE policies.</li> </ul>

**Table 5.1** Main topics addressed in interviews to stakeholders.

b) Semi-structured interviews with Head Teacher, Practitioner and Teaching Assistant

As was previously explained, the interviews held with the Head Teacher of the preschool institution, as well as the Practitioner and Teaching Assistant of the classroom, and the parents of the children participating in the Book Making activity, were conducted throughout the study, even though the analysis of such data was not included in the final thesis. Nonetheless, I will describe the main areas that were covered in the interviews:

i. Semi-structured interviews with Head Teacher, Practitioner and Teaching Assistant

Interviews with practitioners and teaching assistants were carried out after the video recordings in order to use the information gathered in the observations to engage participants in a dynamic dialogue that enabled the appearance of multiple meanings regarding their conceptualisations of Quality and Equity. Moreover, the interview included areas such as education in general, ECE in Chile, and the role they attribute to ECE. The interviews were held separately during the months of June and July of 2015.

Some of the main questions included in the interviews were:

Main Topics in Interview to Head Teacher, Practitioner and teaching Assistant	
<b>Experience and Work History</b>	Field and years of expertise in ECE of the interviewee. Current role within the preschool institution, main tasks and work structure. Motivation to work in ECE (relevance of ECE from his/her perspective).
<b>Chilean Context in ECE</b>	Current context of ECE in Chile, advances and challenges. Pillars of ECE in Chile.
<b>Quality and Equity in ECE</b>	Conceptualization of Quality and Equity in ECE. Evaluation of Quality and Equity in ECE in Chile. Relationship between Quality and Equity and the design of public policies during the last years. Relevance of Quality and Equity in ECE policies and their relation to your specific context and practice within the preschool institution.

**Table 5.2** Main topics addressed in interviews to Head Teacher, Practitioner and Teaching Assistant.

ii. Semi-structured interview with Parents

The interviews with parents were scheduled to be implemented after the first semester, when the children who participated in the Book Making activity were already selected. Thus, parents and children were invited to participate in the data gathering process at the same time. Specifically, the parents were invited during their monthly meeting with the practitioner by the end of the first semester, and the interviews were scheduled according to their availability.

The interviews were semi-structured, and included broad topics to be addressed, especially in terms of their perceptions regarding ECE in general, and the preschool in particular (including the classroom). The main topics included in the interview were:

Main Topics in Interview to Parents
<b>Chilean Context in ECE</b>
Definition of ECE, main purpose Pillars of ECE in Chile.
<b>Quality and Equity in ECE</b>
Conceptualization of Quality and Equity in ECE. Evaluation of Quality and Equity in ECE in Chile. Evaluation of Quality and Equity in ECE in the preschool institution, and ways in which the preschool promotes Quality and Equity, according to their experience.

**Table 5.3** Main topics addressed in interviews to Parents

### iii. Review of Relevant Documents

It is important to first establish a detailed description of the specific context in which conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile are put into practice. Thus, it was necessary to include a review of the main documents that structure ECE in Chile, that is: the recent bill<sup>14</sup> that was approved by the congress; the report accompanying the proposal of the law project; and the General Law of Education, specifically where it refers to ECE. (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2010, 2015)

The aim of this document review was to identify the ‘official discourse’ regarding ECE in Chile, and how the concepts of Quality are defined and incorporated into this discourse. I will describe the analysis approach to the review of documents and interviews to stakeholders in the following section of this Chapter.

<sup>14</sup> This Bill was enacted on May of 2015, as part of a series of Bills designed within the Chilean educational reform which included early childhood, primary, secondary and higher education. It involved the creation of the Early Childhood Education Sub-secretary, the Intendancy of Early Childhood Education, as well as various amendment to other decrees.

#### 5.6.4 Gathering Tools: Children's Experience of Preschool

The activities were designed drawing on an ethnographic approach, which focuses on understanding how participants act, predict, interpret and construct their own context. As Green, Dikson and Zaharlick comment "Ethnographers seek understandings of the cultural patterns and practices of everyday life of the group under study from an emic or insider's perspective" (2003, p. 22). In this sense, I used an ethnographic perspective when immersing myself in the context of an ECE preschool/classroom, analysing its context and taking into account these elements. Additionally, I incorporated elements of participatory research, particularly in research with children, and incorporating specific elements contained in the Mosaic Approach proposed by Allison Clark and Peter Moss (2005), which develops a series of strategies and tools to listen to children, acknowledging them as active constructors of meaning and including a variety of data gathering tools that do not only rely on the spoken discourse (i.e. photographs, drawings, videos, among other techniques) (Clark & Moss, 2011).

Table 5.4 shows the group of participants and the activities in which they were involved:

Group of Participants	Participants main characteristics	Activities
<b>Classroom group</b>	25 children <sup>15</sup> aged between 3 and 4 years old, attending a Middle Major level classroom.	Non-recorded observations Recorded observations Informal conversations
<b>Small group</b>	5 children aged between 3 and 4 years old, part of the classroom group.	Book Making: - Photograph session - Book making session

**Table 5.4** Summary of participating children and activities in which they were involved.

<sup>15</sup> Children who did not participate in the small group, are named as 'boy' or 'girl' in the transcripts shown in this thesis, as a way of maintaining their anonymity. Children in the small group were identified with fictional names, as the activities in which they participated involved the description of their individual views on their preschool, so it was necessary to distinguish each of them for the purpose of analysis.

Next, I will describe each of the activities developed with the children participating in the study.

a) Observations in preschool and classroom (with field notes)

The observations were carried out from March to June of 2015. The main purposes of these were as follows: a) insert myself in the context of the preschool and identify its main features; b) establish a bond with the practitioner, teaching assistant and children in the classroom selected; c) identify key dimensions and activities to observe and record in the next period.

The observations occurred mainly during the morning (8:00 am to 12:00pm), two times a week (depending on the extracurricular activities developed in the preschool), and included observations of daily routines such as the morning greeting, breakfast, attendance list, among others. It also included two main activities: one in which the teaching assistant was in charge, and one where the practitioner was in charge of implementing the activity. Lastly, it included observations in the playground during recess. In total, 4 detailed periods of observations were made in the classroom and preschool, from April to June of 2015.

Each time, I used field notes to include my observations both in terms of explaining in detail what was happening, but also including my own perceptions of specific situations, and of dimensions to take into account later.

At first, the observations were 'passive', that is, I had no involvement in the activities and remained as an 'external observer' (acknowledging that it is not possible to stay completely objective and external to the context in which one is observing). Later, when a bond was established between myself, the practitioner, the teaching assistant, and most importantly the children (they started to recognize me, greeting me when I arrived), I began to get involved in the activities and to participate in conversations with the children.



b) Recorded observations (with field notes) in classroom

The purpose of the video recordings was to cover the main activity inside the classroom selected, including interactions between the children and adults (practitioner and teaching assistant), and also between adults. The duration of each recording lasted around 30 to 45 minutes, and was focused on the main activity of the morning since both the practitioner and the teaching assistant participated in it, and this was also the time of the day where the majority of the children were present (especially during the coldest months of winter, a lot of children came in to the preschool later and/or were picked up by their parents after lunch).

The aim of these video recordings was to illustrate this particular setting, the interactions that occurred in it, the dialogues that were put into action between the participants, the concepts used in the practice of different activities, and how the conceptualisations of Quality were (or were not) present in the everyday practice of ECE. In total, 7 recorded observations were made inside the classroom, where the first one included the activity implemented by me to get informed consent from the children.

c) Book making

As previously mentioned in this Chapter, visual methods combined with a participatory approach have been widely used during the past years, allowing researchers to understand children's experiences through their own words, images, actions and interactions between each other, as well as with other adults including researchers (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). In relation to this, the use of visual methods as a strategy to incorporate children's voices is important since it enables them to express their own meanings, values and views regarding a specific subject, without restricting the dialogue process to verbal communication. Taking this into account, I designed activities organized in stages (a phased approach) to include children in the research process using visual methods that would allow them to share their experience of preschool with me in ways they chose. Specifically, the book making consisted on a series of activities:

## Photograph session

Children had the opportunity to take pictures of their ECE Centre, guided by a series of open questions sought to engage children in a discussion about their centre, and how they perceive it and value it.

### Guiding Questions: Photograph Session

1. Could you show me a little bit about your preschool/classroom?
2. What do you think are *good* things your preschool has? Could we take pictures of those things? Why do you think these things are *good* things?
3. What kind of things you do not like about your preschool? What kind of things do not make you feel so good?

**Table 5.5** Guiding questions for photograph session with children.

These sessions were conducted individually and had an approximate duration of 30-45 minutes with each child. I took field notes of this activity to complement the information collected through the photographs and the guiding questions.

The setting of the activity consisted in the preschool and the children's classroom. If they wanted to go to specific settings (such as the kitchen or the offices), we would ask for previous permission to enter.

## Book making session

Lastly, I conducted an activity with the children in which we selected a series of photographs that could describe in the best way their experience of preschool, and the meaning they attribute to that experience.

### Guiding Questions: Book Making

1. How do you think we could explain to someone else how your preschool/classroom looks like? What photos do you think we should use?
2. What are the photographs showing about your preschool? What kind of things would you like to include in your book?
2. Would you like to add something else to the photographs? Would you like to make drawings or write something else?

**Table 5.6** Guiding questions for book making activity.

The purpose of this activity was to co-construct with each child, their experience of preschool/classroom, including the photographs they took, drawings they made in the book, and writings about things they discussed while making the book.

This activity was conducted on two separate occasions, each with two of the four children who ultimately participated in the book making<sup>16</sup>, and lasting around 30-45 minutes. I asked the four participating children if I could record the activity (video recording) to help us analyse our findings later.

As this activity took a considerable amount of time of the day, I previously discussed the activity with the practitioner and the teaching assistants, and adapted it so that it made logistical sense for each participant in terms of their school timetable. I only carried out the activity once I had built a relationship of trust between the participants, so that it was possible to develop a dynamic dialogue with the children, incorporating them not only in the activity itself but also in its design, and the objectives that it pursued.

In short, I defined the different activities and gathering tools, taking into account my methodological framework as well as my positionality, aiming at collecting information that was meaningful both to me as a researcher, and to the participants as social actors involved in ECE in Chile. In this sense, I constantly

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<sup>16</sup> One of the children who participated taking pictures, was absent from the preschool during the weeks I developed the book making activity, and was not able to participate. Nonetheless, I included the interview and photographs taken by the child into the analysis process.

reflected on how the activities could be adapted according to the context in which they were implemented, looking to gather information in depth, respecting the setting in which I participated, as well as the people who were involved in the investigation.

### ***5.6.5 Making Sense of the Data: Analysis Methods***

The analysis of qualitative data, especially when using different gathering tools as well as different forms of language (photographs and drawings as well as observations) will involve a lengthy process consisting of different stages. For this reason, I guided my analysis using a thematic analysis approach identifying patterns within the data gathered, organizing and describing those patterns in a coherent and comprehensive manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of thematic analysis allowed me to make sense of the large amount of data I collected, through an ongoing process of reflection between the theory and the information gathered during the fieldwork, as well as my own positionality as a researcher and my own beliefs (Holliday, 2007). As Holliday points out, using a thematic analysis approach allowed me to view the data in a holistic manner, rearranging it under common themes and categories that arise from the analytical process.

In terms of the focus of analysis, as this was a case study with an ethnographic approach, the aim of my research was to understand the 'official discourse' and children's perspectives in its particularities, what they are communicating, how they can be interpreted by me within the broader context of neo-colonial discourses, acknowledging my own subjectivity in the process, and the complexity of analysing human interactions and perceptions (Holliday, 2007; Willis, 2007). Similarly, I developed the analysis process as an ongoing interaction between the data and myself, not limiting the analysis process to a single stage, but rather engaging in reflections throughout the whole research process, including during the fieldwork and later organization of the information. In this sense, I recognize that my interpretation of the data is one of many possibilities of constructing and reconstructing the social reality of that local setting.

I analysed the data from the 'official discourse' and data from children's perspectives separately, though they undoubtedly informed one another. Even though I followed the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006) in terms of how to develop thematic analysis, each process is characterized by different particularities, thus, I will describe them separately to focus on each process in as much detail as possible.

a) Untangling the 'official discourse' of Quality in ECE

As mentioned previously in this Chapter, I disentangled what I call the 'official discourse' of Quality in ECE in Chile, through the analysis of policy documents as well as semi-structured interviews with policymakers and one student movement leader. The data collected via these methods was retrieved and indexed using NVivo 11, a 'computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software' (CAQDAS). The use of the software facilitated the organization of the data, and allowed me to make sense of the information in a more orderly manner.

Firstly, the interviews were transcribed and imported into the software, followed by the official documents. Once imported, I began reading, making annotations that would help me sort the information later. I began this process not in the software but with pen and paper, to familiarize myself with the data and find areas of interest to analyse further afterwards. Once I reviewed each transcript and document, I began the process of coding, described by Richards (2009) as the process of bringing together the data and the reflections around the most salient issues, in relation to your research questions. Thus, I firstly coded each set of data, by incorporating my annotations into Nvivo11 and coding the data accordingly. Next, I reviewed and refined each code, to be able to organize them into broader categories or common themes. Once I had a first draft of the themes, I returned to the transcripts to review each code and my interpretation of them, following the guidelines of Richards (2009) in relation to always going back to the data and reflecting on the emerging categories as an ongoing process. Later, I once again refined the categories and themes emerging from my reflections and analysis, and went back to the transcripts and documents one last time to

organize the quotes and references according to the categories and themes I constructed. Once I finish refining the categories, I developed a diagram to relate each of them to broader themes, to facilitate the description of the analysis process and further reflections on the issues highlighted.

b) Interpreting children's meaning making of their preschool experience

I chose to analyse children's views in terms of how they constructed meaning surrounding their preschool experience. As Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) describe it, the concept of Quality entails a very specific way of understanding education, as well as particular values and ideologies. Thus, a more appropriate way of approaching children's experience and conceptualisation of their education, is using the idea of meaning making, defined by them as a "democratic process of interpretation (...) that involves making practice visible and thus subject to reflection, dialogue and argumentation, leading to a judgement of value, contextualised and provisional because it is always subject to contestation" (p.ix). The idea here is to encourage participating children to talk about their experience, and reflect on what makes sense to them through the use of photographs and drawings. Children are encouraged to reflect and discuss what they value about their everyday practice, which at the same time allowed me to engage in a discussion about their preschool experience. In this sense, my approach to the analysis of children's experience of preschool was guided by what Clark proposes in her approach, that is, to allow children to "explore the ways in which they perceive the world and communicate their ideas in a way that is meaningful to them" (Clark, 2005b, p. 17). It is important to acknowledge however, that this interpretation is also influenced by my own views as an adult, and even though I intended to describe children's experiences and interpretation as respectfully as possible, my own values and interpretations are still present, and thus, need to be recognized as part of the analysis process (Fine, 2002).

As the data gathered with the children was collected through different strategies involving diverse forms of communication, the analysis process was not as straight forward as the one developed for the 'official discourse'. In this sense, organizing the information and familiarizing myself with the language used and

forms of communicating was crucial. Thus, I firstly organized the materials according to the gathering tools used, and began reviewing the data, and looking for common emerging themes to organize children's experience (Clark & Moss, 2011). Next, I began the coding process, looking at the data as a whole and focusing on describing children's experiences in preschool. I reviewed firstly the recorded and non-recorded observations along with the field notes. Next, I focused on the interviews with the children, looking at the photographs and drawings in the albums at the same time, to be able to understand and interpret children's communication forms in an in-depth manner.

Once I had a first list of codes, I went back to the data and reflected on each code, organizing them around the emerging common themes, described in terms of children's experiences of preschool. In this stage, I aimed at looking at all the data as a whole, looking to understand children's meaning making process through the use of different ways of communicating. Next, I rearranged the data into categories, and went back to the data one last time to refine the analysis process. Once I had completed the description of the categories, I developed a model to explain the relations between the categories I described, and how they interact to construct meaning about children's experience of preschool.

## **5.7 Positionality, Reflexivity and Ethical Issues in the Making of Research**

As part of an interpretive and critical approach, the problematization of one's own positionality within the research project is paramount, since it is from this positionality that one will construct the research questions, the modes of data gathering, and the interpretation of such data. Furthermore, the description of one's positionality is related to an ongoing process of reflexivity that is necessary throughout the whole study (De la Cuesta Benjumea, 2003). Thus, as De la Cuesta mentions, the role that the researcher adopts will define the way in which he/she will become embedded in the social context researched, as well as the kind of data that he/she will consider as relevant to obtain and later interpret.

Describing one's own positionality is a complex and ongoing process, as we have arguably not one but multiple positionalities that come into force each time we define and occupy our role in a particular research process (Bettez, 2015). Bettez describes the process of constructing our own positionality as a mixture of one's involvement in different social groups (e.g. gender, class, race, sexuality, nationality, among others), and a personal interpretation of one's experiences, which influence the way we approach knowledge, how we perceive our own knowledge, and how we address the way in which we come to know things. Similarly, Anthias (2008) proposes that our positionality is constantly moving and shifting according to our experiences and how we incorporate new knowledge into our research methods. Both descriptions relate to my approach to research, as they recognize that a researcher is never neutral nor objective when it comes to addressing a social phenomenon, and they value the subjective nature of how knowledge is (co)constructed through a social process.

The way in which we are positioned in the social world not only influences how we address social conflict, but it also influences what we recognize as a conflict in itself, and what we consider as social problems and injustices. Thus, initially, my positionality towards this research project was influenced by my personal lived experiences, that is, starting from the fact that I was born in a Latin American country during the last moments of a 17 year long dictatorship; that I grew up in a middle class family and studied in a university that is described as a 'quality university'; that I actively participated in the 2006 student movement that promoted the establishment of a major educational reform; and that I closely worked in the area of ECE in the Ministry of Education in Chile and witnessed the development of policies aimed at promoting Quality in ECE. Additionally, I consider myself as part of a very reduced group of Chileans who could access higher education, and furthermore, to access postgraduate studies abroad. Similarly, while I am part of a privileged group in terms of access to education and my social class position within Chile, I also am part of a discriminated group as I am a woman living in a still strongly misogynistic culture.



My positionality towards this study was a thing of considerable complexity since I could relate both as a perpetuator of inequalities as well as a receiver of such inequalities. For this reason, I developed my positionality from a perspective that recognized, first, that knowledge is constructed from particular and incomplete visions of the world, and that it is permanently influenced by how we experience that world, and what our position is in that world. In addition, in my position as a researcher working directly with children, I was also aware of the inequalities present in my relationship with them as an adult who is also an outsider to their context. Thus, my positionality did not entail a static definition, moreover, it was a constantly ongoing process of defining myself in the research process, acknowledging both the continuities present in that definition (such as my race and gender among others), as well as the contradictions that my role as a researcher in this study provokes.

### ***5.7.1 Postcolonial Feminism as a Form of Situating Myself in the Research Process***

As my research was grounded in the theoretical approaches of feminist postcolonial theory, my positionality was embedded in this approach as well. Specifically, postcolonial theory is useful when talking about positionality, and particularly, postcolonial feminism relates closely to my understanding of my position as a researcher within this study.

For postcolonial theory, it is central to “create alternative discourses that challenge established, dominant discourses by giving voice to those who have been marginalized by history and viewed as Other” (Khan et al., 2007, p. 231). In this sense, I also aimed to create an alternative discourse by including the voice of children and their conceptualisation of education as it relates to Quality as a way of giving voice to those who have been silenced by the hegemonic and androcentric discourse of capitalism, and specifically, when it comes to defining what Quality is and how such a concept plays an important role in developing education opportunities for children. Similarly, postcolonial feminism seeks to recognize the differences and particularities of marginalized subjects, and attempts to make explicit the ‘gendered’ nature of those voices. Furthermore,

research through a postcolonial feminist lens encourages the recognition of the 'gendered' nature not only of the issues analysed or the participants involved in research, but of the researcher as well (Khan et al., 2007). Thus, a postcolonial feminist approach becomes a useful tool to critique the structures that silence different discourses, not only because it gives voice to those who have been marginalized, but also because it allows for different discourses within research to emerge as equally valid, by questioning concepts such as objectivity, impartiality and universality (Rodríguez, 2015).

When it comes to constructing knowledge, postcolonial feminism has an important contribution to make when questioning the dominant dualisms and oppositions amongst different epistemologies. In this sense, this theoretical orientation considers the traditional scientific method as being part of a patriarchal conception of knowledge. Here, recognition of the partiality of both the participants and the researcher is useful to construct different forms of understanding, that goes beyond stereotypes and universalisms (Rodríguez, 2015). Similarly, Nencel (2014) postulates that reflexivity (as part of the process of constructing your positionality as a researcher) entails both ideas regarding how we should learn about knowledge, as well as how we should do research to obtain such knowledge. Thus, it was necessary that I also include in the construction of my positionality, the ideas I draw upon within postcolonial theory, as well as my position as a woman that questions the hegemonic structure of androcentric approaches to research.

Specifically, Nencel (2014) proposes a form of reflexivity and construction of positionality, by situating oneself within the context of the research process. For her, adopting a process of reflexivity that recognizes the relations of power established between researcher and researched as well as those developed within the broader context is a necessary step. Nonetheless, she also considers that it is important to include in this process, the recognition of our failures as researchers when it comes to engaging in non-hierarchical and horizontal relations with the participants of our research. In my case, aspects such as the hierarchical setting of the preschool or my own limitations as an 'adult researcher' aiming to understand children's perspectives were included in the analysis and

interpretation process, as well as throughout the whole research study. The recognition of these aspects enables us to not only acknowledge the power struggles in an investigation, but also to acknowledge our position as partial human beings and the possibility of engaging in similar power struggles when it comes to researching (Nencel, 2014). Nencel draws on the concept of 'situated knowledge' developed by another feminist researcher, Donna Haraway, as it recognizes the incompleteness of knowledge, respecting the fact that what we as researchers interpret as knowledge, is only a small part of what is actually experienced by the research subjects. In this sense, our own epistemology is situated in a specific location, where partiality is a condition for developing a critical standpoint regarding other people's lived experiences (in my case, the understanding of key actors' discourse of Quality in ECE in Chile) (Haraway, 1988). In addition, she advocates for a postcolonial understanding of the concept, including also an ongoing questioning of the ways in which we approach knowledge, and how the voices of those who have been marginalized are being represented in our own research, and within that research.

All of our ways of knowing are situated in a historical, social and personal context. From this perspective, the fundamental problem of social science research is to understand that knowledge constitutes a form of social practice that needs to be analysed in a particular social and individual context (Sandoval, 2013). Thus, in sum, I argue that my positionality was constructed within the context of a female Latin researcher with a particular social and individual background that informs how I approach the study of social phenomena, and that this positionality entailed tensions and contradictions that influenced the manner in which I interpreted and analysed the experiences of the participants of my study.

### **5.7.2 Bringing Emotions into the Data**

It was of great significance to me, to be able to incorporate forms of knowledge not only drawing from traditional ways of interpreting and analysing data (such as written data), but to also incorporate data that arose from sensorial as well as emotional experiences. Considering myself as an interpretive researcher with a critical perspective allowed me to get involved in a specific preschool setting where I developed a bond between myself as a researcher and the research participants (both teachers and children). I experienced diverse emotions and related to the participants both through verbal communication as well as nonverbal forms, and considered this to be of equal if not greater importance in terms of understanding their discourse of Quality in ECE. Emotions experienced both by the participants as well as by me as a researcher, were intimately related to how the interpretation of the lived experiences of the children were ultimately analysed and described in terms of their conceptualisation of Quality.

For a researcher involved in qualitative studies, emotions are embedded in every step of the process, yet little discussion is developed around this subject, especially in terms of the research process and the emotions elicited by it (Jansson, 2010; Weller & Caballero, 2009; Widdowfield, 2000). As Widdowfield argues, while there is a recognition of how a researcher's positionality may influence the manner in which data is collected and interpreted, there is still a lack of awareness of how emotions and feelings are included as part of the research process (something she calls a 'masculinist' way of knowing). Similarly, McDowell describes the work of feminist researchers who have:

Revealed the ways in which the mind/body, public/private, culture/nature, reason/emotion, concrete/abstract dichotomies are mapped onto gender differences so that the inferior of the two attributes is, in each case, assumed to be feminine and as such natural and so excluded from theoretical investigation (McDowell, 1992, p. 409).

In this sense, emotions have been mostly described in terms of something to 'address' in the process of reflexivity and how they can 'affect' the results of an investigation, rather than giving them importance in terms of valuable information for the research itself, as well as how it influences the work of researchers in the field.

Nonetheless, there is an academic movement that argues for giving emotions a central role in research and the construction of knowledge, as emotions and knowledge need to be seen as complementary and mutually constitutive in terms of producing trustworthy accounts of social experiences and processes (Holland, 2009). Thus, emotions can be seen as another form of knowing the world, where "emotions are the means by which we make sense of and relate to our physical, natural and social world" (Holland, 2009, p. 12), and as such, they constitute a valid and relevant form of data that can (and should) be used to develop research.

Within the field of qualitative research, a series of authors have begun to give emotions a relevant place not only in the reflexive process of problematizing one's positionality, but in the process of analysis as well, including emotions as an 'interpretive resource' (Bondi, 2005). In particular, researchers engaged with a subjective approach to investigation recognize the integral part that emotions have to play in conducting studies, and the impact that emotions can have on the construction of knowledge, especially when developing qualitative research where the relationship with the participants becomes close and intimate (Widdowfield, 2000). Thus, as my research is thought from an interpretive approach with critical elements also included, and particularly because I used a strategy that allowed me to connect with the participants (especially children) in a more intimate form, I consider emotions to be an integral part of my research. In this sense, the importance of emotions lies not only in terms of how they influence and demarcate my positionality throughout the study, but also because they become a relevant form of data that informs the way in which children make meaning of their preschool experience, especially in interaction with others.

Even though the discussion of emotions and the importance of emotions in research methods has been granted to feminist approaches to research, the interpretive paradigm has also addressed this issue, giving attention to lived experiences as well as beliefs and values, questioning the idea that social phenomena exist independently from how members of society interpret them, thus, allowing for subjectivity in a broader sense to be included as a major part of the construction of knowledge (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn, & Kemmer, 2001). Denzin also comments on emotions as 'embodied experiences', and as such, they can inform and be interpreted as another set of data when conducting research (Denzin, 1984).

Emotions can be incorporated into research in different forms. For instance, they can be displayed when interpreting a participant's response, where the researcher infers another person's standpoint from how they express themselves, including the way they feel and the way they make the researcher feel. In this regard, Hochschild (1983) describes emotions as a 'signal function' where emotional responses are defined in the same way as cognitive responses, acting as clues to interpret and analyse experiences. Similarly, Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer argue that knowledge is:

Not something objective and removed from our own bodies, experiences and emotions but is created through our experiences of the world as a sensuous and affective activity. [...] Emotions are the means by which we make sense of, and relate to, our physical, natural and social world. In this sense, emotion has epistemological significance because we can only 'know' through our emotions and not simply our cognition or intellect (Hubbard et al., 2001, p. 126).

According to these authors, emotions have diverse functions in the research process. Firstly, emotions can be used as data in the sense that participants not only give valuable information through their words or acts, but also through the expression of particular emotions that need to be taken into account. Secondly, the emotionality deployed on an interview, observation or any research activity also influences how such activity will be developed, as well as other future activities. Thirdly, the researcher's emotional response to a participant's experience as well as an interaction can also be used as data in the analysis, especially in terms of an ongoing reflexive process. Lastly, emotions experienced

during a research process can ultimately influence a researchers' personal and professional identity.

Similarly, the use of emotions and senses as data is also mentioned by Elizabeth Adams St Pierre (1997) as a form of data, where incorporating our emotions and sensations in the process of analysis can allow us to better understand the experiences of our research participants, acknowledging the effects that the research process has not only in terms of our ideas, but in terms of our physical experience as well. For this author, emotions can be incorporated as data just as much as what participants tell us through interviews or what we can observe through their interactions. Additionally, our sensations can also be incorporated both in terms of what we feel and experience in the setting that is being studied, as well as the sensations that arise in the very process of analysis.

### ***5.7.3 Ethical Issues when Researching from a Critical Perspective: Tensions and Reflections on 'Giving Voice'***

Ethical issues present throughout the research process need to be critically discussed, both during the design and during the development of the investigation (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). Even though there are formal procedures established to ensure the safety and well-being of participants involved in a study<sup>17</sup>, there are also ethical issues that arise from the particularities of the research process that need to be taken into account, particularities which perhaps are not being addressed through traditional paths for obtaining ethical approval and thus, need to be discussed every step of the way (DePalma, 2011; Tracy & Carmichael, 2011).

During the whole research process, I struggled with a series of ethical issues and reflections regarding my role as a researcher, my positionality and the ways in which I was putting my words into practice. One of the main issues arising from the research process had to do with including children's perspectives into the study, and dealing at the same time with the restraints of the context in terms of

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<sup>17</sup> Formal documents regarding ethical approval are included in Appendix 3.

respecting and genuinely giving 'voice' to them, as well as my own limitations as an adult researcher in representing and interpreting their perspectives. Thus, I will centre my reflection on these issues, relating them to how my positionality was conflicted by them, and how I reflected on them and included them as part of the ongoing process of doing qualitative research with a critical approach.

Firstly, as this study is situated in the context of the Chilean ECE system, I had to follow a series of bureaucratic steps to be able to access a public Chilean preschool, and specifically, to be able to work and research with children in such context. Thus, the first ethical issue I encountered had to do with the highly hierarchical structure of the Chilean educational system, and how before I could even talk to potential participants of the research, I had to 'validate' myself as a researcher, as well as my research design and aims, to people who are not directly involved in the preschool context, but still hold power over the activities that go on inside it. In this sense, the initial authorisation for conducting research with the participants did not come from the participants themselves, rather it came from precisely those who are situated in positions of power within the ECE context in Chile. Thus, I felt conflicted with the idea of developing a critical approach towards dominant discourses in ECE in Chile, whilst having to respect and follow the guidelines designed by those who promote and reproduce such dominant discourse. Similarly, by gaining access through the authorization of those who did not participate in the research process, I affected the way the actual participants were included, as their involvement in the study was inevitably influenced (and even forced) by this context. Thus, I had to firstly, recognize that my critical approach as well as my aim to include children's 'voices' was constantly mediated by the constraints of the system, and that my analysis needed to include such reflections. I acknowledged how such bureaucratic processes already say something about the dominant discourses embedded in ECE policies such as how decisions are made in those contexts, how (or if) children have possibilities to decide on their participation in different activities within the preschool, and how, I as an adult researcher, presented myself to the children, and how that influenced the way in which they communicated their experiences to me.



In relation to access to the stakeholders interviewed, this was also a conflicting issue throughout the research process. On the one hand, the field of ECE in Chile has become an important part of policy design in education during the last decades, however, the people who work in the area is still relatively low, and thus, gaining access to them to discuss issues from a critical perspective can create conflicts in terms of anonymity and confidentiality. In this sense, I had to ensure the participants' anonymity not only by using consent forms that explicitly stated it, but also when describing their role within the ECE system (because describing it in detail would inevitably affect the anonymity of the participants). On the other hand, as I described earlier in this section, access to people working in public institutions is fairly difficult, especially in the institutions in charge of providing public ECE in Chile. Thus, I had to reflect on how the people I included as participants were respected in their anonymity, without diluting their specific role in the process of policy making in ECE (Ryen, 2011).

Anonymity and confidentiality were also issues of reflection within the case study. Even though consent was sought for with every child not only at the beginning of the research process but also throughout the activities developed, it was important for me to acknowledge that children were not completely free to choose whether to participate or not, so I had to ensure that the way I conducted the activities and our conversations and reflections needed to be as flexible as possible, to be able to allow children to have control over what and how they wanted to tell me about their experiences (Alderson, 2004). Similarly, I constantly reflected on my position as a researcher, the power relations established with children (especially at the beginning when I was associated with being another 'teacher'), and how me being an adult would always entail differences in how I expressed myself and how children interpreted my questions and reflections, and vice versa (Christensen, 2004; Greig et al., 2007; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). In this regard, I struggled greatly at the beginning of the fieldwork, with the fact that I could be considered an intruder in the preschool setting, an adult intruder who already had some form of 'complicity' with other adults in regulating these children's lives. Moreover, since I am an adult, it was assumed I should have some form of power over children's discipline. Thus, I had to re-construct my relationship with children, which at first seemed very frustrating for me as I moved

back and forward from a more reciprocal and symmetrical relation, to a more asymmetrical and hierarchical one. Lastly, I was able to define my relationship with the children not in terms of our social positions, but in terms of our common interests, our likes and dislikes, and our ways of communicating. Even though I was always aware of the constraints not only of the specific setting and social context, but of the research as well, it was still guided by an attempt to develop a close relationship with children based on our similarities and our emotional connections that would allow us to create a space where they felt free to communicate their thoughts and feelings in whatever way they decided.

By basing my positionality not only in my role as an adult Latin American woman researcher, but also as an emotional human being, I was able to reflect in a much deeper way, on the ethical issues I struggled with during the whole research process. In this sense, I included my feelings and emotions when adapting the strategies, I used to collect information, in the analysis process and in the writing process of this thesis.

## **5.8. Summary of Chapter**

I designed this research project from an interpretivist/constructionist and critical paradigm, assuming that the way in which we understand social phenomena and conflicts is influenced by socio-historical constructions. This allowed me to include postcolonial and feminist perspectives, looking to reflect on the specific cultural, economic, political and social context of Chile. Moreover, I was able to analyse how such context influences the way conceptualizations of Quality take place in the 'official discourse', and how children's perspectives and meaning making of their ECE experience influences and is influenced by this 'official discourse'.

In terms of my methodology, I developed a case study approach drawing from ethnography, including the analysis of the broader context in which this case study is embedded, using a series of different methods to collect information, aiming to position myself as a 'bricoleur'. In this sense, I included different

theoretical and methodological perspectives, aiming to analyse how different meanings and discourses relating ECE in Chile and the conceptualisation of Quality, are constructed and put into practice. Similarly, by using several methods, including visual and participatory strategies with children, I aimed at understanding the participants' perspectives through different forms of communication, looking to develop spaces where children could express their views in the most genuine manner, taking into account the constraints of the social context in which children are embedded, and their specific preschool setting.

Lastly, as my research is designed from a critical and interpretivist approach, the construction of my positionality was also intimately related to ethical issues arising throughout the investigation. Thus, I dealt with aspects such as my role as a researcher, confidentiality and trustworthiness, as well as issues related to my own and the participants' emotionality, developing an in-depth understanding of the whole research process.

## PART IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

“Me gusta contarles cuentos a mis amigas... Me gusta estar con la tía porque ella es cariñosa conmigo. La tía enseña cosas, los números, las letras.  
También hacemos tareas de inglés”

*“I like to tell stories to my friends ... I like to be with the ‘aunt’ because she is affectionate with me. The ‘aunt’ teaches things, numbers, letters. We also do English homework”*

(Carolina, Photograph session in the Preschool)

## Chapter 6: The Official Discourse of Quality in Early Childhood Education in Chile

### 6.1 Introduction

This Chapter focuses on the analysis of the conceptualisations of Quality, by what I call 'the official discourse' of Quality in ECE in Chile. This discourse is characterized through interviewing stakeholders involved in the process of policy making and the political discussions regarding this subject, as well as official documents that describe this educational stage and its main objectives. Thus, I aimed at understanding how the official discourse defines and uses the concept of Quality, by interpreting the data gathered from the interviewed stakeholders and my analysis of relevant documents.

In this stage of analysis, I sought to understand the nature of conceptualisations of Quality present in the official discourse, interpreted from both the official documents analysed as well as the stakeholders interviewed. Similarly, I aimed at identifying the tensions present in the conceptualisation constructed from the data, looking to understand, by using a postcolonial and feminist approach, the underlying discourses present when defining Quality in ECE in Chile. In relation to this, this analysis looks to answer, firstly, the main research question of this study:

*What are the conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile present in the official discourse of stakeholders, and how do these conceptualisations influence and are influenced by the conceptualisations given by children participating in an ECE classroom in relation to their preschool experience?*

This phase of the analysis focuses on the first part of the main research question which is specified through the following complementary question:

- 1) *How is the official discourse of Quality in ECE in Chile constructed by stakeholders?*

Guided by these research questions, in this Chapter, I will firstly summarize the gathering tools and analysis method used. Secondly, I will describe the overall analysis process, starting with the diagram that includes the emergent categories and their relation to the conceptualisation of Quality. Thirdly, I will describe each of the categories interpreted by my analysis, and lastly, I will summarize the findings in relation to the 'official discourse' around the main tensions present in such discourse.

## **6.2 Data Gathering and Analysis**

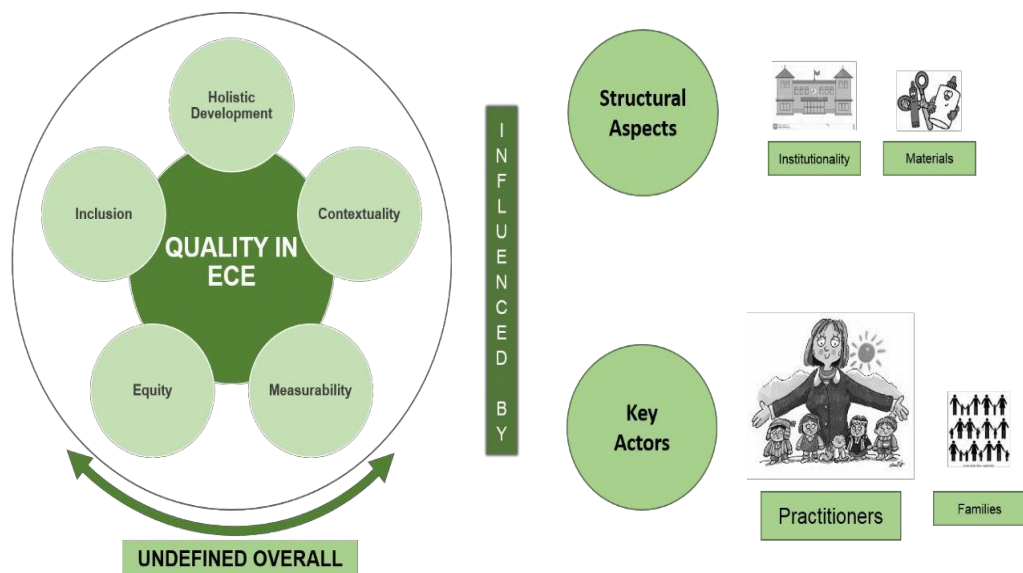
The people interviewed and the documents used were chosen strategically in order to have a broad vision as to how Quality is conceptualised from what I defined as 'official discourse', both in terms of formal documents that represent the State's perspective on ECE, but also including the view of key actors involved in policy design, and policy and political discussions regarding ECE. Thus, the following activities were used to develop this stage of analysis:

- 4 Semi-structured interviews (3 policymakers and 1 student movement leader)
- Document analysis of 3 official documents: the recent law project that was approved by the congress; the report accompanying the proposal of the law project; and the General Law of Education, specifically where it refers to ECE (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2010, 2015).

Three main Categories emerged from the process of thematic analysis (the methodology of which was discussed in the previous Chapter): Relevance of ECE, The concept of Quality and Factors of Quality. Each of these categories will be described below, as well as the tensions and contradictions entailed by each category and between them. These categories aim to reflect the 'official discourse' conceptualisation of Quality in ECE, the context in which such conceptualisation takes place, and how the different aspects discussed relate to how Quality is constructed and defined. Additionally, I organized the categories according not only to the data gathered during the fieldwork, but also to how the

literature has defined the concept, taking into account that the 'official discourse' represented in this study is also influenced by how Quality has been defined in that literature.

As the diagram illustrates, the conceptualisation of Quality in this context, was shown to include specific features that are associated with the concept. However, there was overall consensus regarding its undefined nature, and this assumption is present regardless of the mention of particular features. Similarly, the stakeholders interviewed and the documents reviewed also showed specific factors that influence how Quality is defined, which are described as interacting with the concept at a more external level (I return to a discussion of this diagram in 6.4).



**Figure 6.1** Conceptualisation of Quality from the 'official discourse'.

It is important to show how the idea of Quality as an undefined concept encloses all other features mentioned. As I shall explain later in this Chapter, both the participants interviewed as well as the documents analysed mentioned Quality as a concept that has not yet been clearly defined in the Chilean context, however, they did mention specific features and characteristics involved in its definition. Thus, I would argue that due to the underpinning priority given to the notion of Quality as an undefined concept, any subsequent feature of Quality is relativized. This renders each of the concepts used to describe Quality ambiguous.

As Casassus (2003) proposes, there seems to be an ‘emotional value’ added to a concept that on the one hand, is explicitly described as ‘undefined’, but on the other hand, entails specific features that are aligned with what appears to be contradictory beliefs, for instance, its contextual versus its measurable nature (discussed later in this Chapter). Additionally, some of the concepts used to define Quality were also discussed by participants as ambiguous, so there appears to be a tension in using concepts that are universally validated as relevant in the discussion of Quality, but at the same time, do not have a clear definition. As Casassus points out, the ‘emotional value’ given to such concepts obscures the fact that there is no clarity as to what they refer to, what idea of education they foster, and what type of discourse they are based on. In this sense, the dominant (and very specific) discourses present in the conceptualisation of Quality are hidden under the common notion that Quality is a necessary and pivotal aspect of education.

### **6.3 Relevance of Early Childhood Education in Chile: Why Quality Matters.**

The category of *Relevance of Early Childhood Education* can be defined as referring to statements made by the participants and in the documents, that describe this educational stage as an important or necessary stage for children’s development in different areas. I included this category as part of the analysis because both the interviewed participants as well as the documents associated their conceptualisation of Quality with how they perceive ECE as part of the educational system in Chile. In this sense, describing how relevant ECE is according to the ‘official discourse’ allowed me to not only conceptualise Quality in ECE in Chile, but also to relate it to broader discourses of ECE, and how it is positioned in this broader context. Thus, even though this category does not appear in the diagram recently described, it forms part of the context from which Quality in ECE was defined by the ‘official discourse’ in this study.



The issue of relevance described by the participants and mentioned in the documents to ECE in Chile was, first of all, presented as a 'known' fact, that is, as something that has been proved by academia and the 'scientific evidence'. Similarly, it was mentioned as something that ought to be acknowledged by the public, and something that should be in the centre of the discussion of public policies in the area. As one of the documents describes:

Excerpt 1

*“There is broad scientific consensus that early years are fundamental and constitute the most significant period in the formation of an individual, because it is here that the fundamental bases to people’s development are structured. What happens or not at this stage is crucial to the future of any person, therefore, if children found in these stages of high sensitivity do not have proper environmental conditions, they will not only be losing opportunities to deploy their potential, but also risking the expression of skills that unfold throughout life” (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2015, p. 3).*

As the Bill of ECE reform describes, the relevance of ECE is reportedly shown by 'scientific' consensus, that is, international and national evidence that supports this idea. In this sense, firstly, the importance of education during the first years of life is promoted using evidence coming mostly from other countries, where this evidence generally follows the rules of traditional rationalistic research. Secondly, the evidence used to describe its relevance is also linked to ideas of individual 'development'. Thus, it appears this official document centres its arguments around rational, universal and developmental beliefs about knowledge and education, similarly to what has been promoted at a broader level (Cunha et al., 2005; Heckman et al., 1999; Sylva et al., 2004).

### **6.3.1 Relevance at an individual level**

Within this subcategory, stakeholders interviewed as well as the documents appeared to agree that this educational stage is beneficial for individuals, particularly children, promoting what they mention as 'integral development':

#### Excerpt 2

*"(ECE)...whose purpose is to promote in a systematic, timely and pertinent manner the integral development and relevant and meaningful learning in preschool children..." (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2015, p. 8).*

It is interesting to see that ECE was described as an educational stage that aims at promoting 'integral development', a concept equally ambiguous in its definition, but at the same time equally specific to a form of thinking, that is, rationalistic and scientific forms of knowledge. Thus, Quality as a concept was connected with 'development', a psychological concept used to describe a linear set of steps that a human being needs to accomplish in order to become a 'complete' and fully 'developed' human being. Furthermore, what development as a psychological concept implies is that there is a proper way of becoming a fully developed human, and that this way is shared universally and can be measured by standardized instruments (Mayall, 2002; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010). In this case, development was linked to the concept of 'integral' which seeks to include aspects that are not usually measured by such instruments, similar to what the humanistic approach to Quality intends, when including aspects related to values, emotions and ways of interacting with others (UNESCO, 2005).

For one of the policy makers interviewed, there appeared to be a tension in terms of the importance given to ECE as an independent educational stage, because for her, this stage was recognized as pertinent only once it was recognized as significant in relation to other areas:

### Excerpt 3

*"Mister Heckman had to come with an economic study to say that investing in early childhood was much more profitable, so that everyone in the economic world said oh yeah ... I mean ... the importance of stimulating at this stage of life is something that has been known since thousands of years ago, I mean... Paediatricians, neonatologists, psychologists... I mean everybody... from Freud forwards" (Policy Maker 1).*

Specifically, she referred to the fact that ECE became an important issue internationally and at a local level, when 'evidence' coming from the economic world supported this idea. In this sense, there appears to be a connection between the relevance given to ECE, and the economic benefits it entails, causing a tension between the aims of ECE (according to the interviewee) and the economic value that is associated with it, adding that this value is mostly given by those holding economic power (Barrett et al., 2006; Heckman et al., 1999). However, she did use other forms of 'traditional' and 'scientific' knowledge to argue for the relevance of ECE, rather than mention aspects directly associated with education, which I interpreted as another tension within her critique to the economic approach to ECE.

### **6.3.2 Relevance at a Societal Level**

When described as a relevant educational stage at a societal level, two main ideas were mentioned. Firstly, there is an idea that ECE is relevant for society because it allows children to learn how to interact with others, and how to incorporate social rules:

### Excerpt 4

*"I think it is key in terms of the construction of democracy and diversity, and learning to live together and be part of a world with rules, standards, but that you are also a subject of rights and opinion, that you are listened to, you are treated with respect, and they teach you to respect those who are in your environment... It's key as learning in this regard as well" (Policy Maker 1).*

In this sense, ECE was viewed as a space where social norms can be 'rehearsed' and learned through interactions as well as through specific teachings. Additionally, this space was also described by the interviewee as one where children are 'subjects of rights' and are entitled to be treated with respect. Similarly, ECE was mentioned as relevant by the student movement leader because for her, ECE is a space where it is possible to engage in reflections regarding the purpose of education:

#### Excerpt 5

*"These issues need to be conscious decisions and decisions not only incumbent upon the educator but also to teaching assistants, to parents, even children... I wish we could also include them in these discussions to make preschool education something that makes sense to everybody" (Student Movement Leader).*

In this case, the interviewee emphasized that 'making sense' of what ECE means is necessary to achieving Quality of any kind. This is later related to the idea of the 'contextual nature' of ECE as a feature of Quality. Taking this into account, there is a tension between what is defined as societal relevance, in that on the one hand, ECE is viewed as a space where rules (created by adults) can be taught and rehearsed, and on the other hand, this same space is viewed as an opportunity to involve every actor in decision-making, even for contesting rules that do not make sense for those involved directly in ECE. Additionally, the student movement leader mentioned that even though this should be an important aspect of ECE, this is not present in the Chilean context, adding tension to this idea, as what is defined as relevant does not necessarily apply when put into practice.

#### **6.3.3 Relevance at an Economic Level**

Lastly, ECE was mentioned as a stage that promotes economic benefits for society. I introduce this as a separate subcategory and not another form of societal relevance since it was mentioned as a separate matter, and it was given particular prominence in official documents promoting ECE in Chile. Here ECE is

explicitly described as a matter of ‘social profitability’:

#### Excerpt 6

*“According to longitudinal studies that have evaluated social profitability of quality educational programmes in early childhood, each dollar invested in preschool education can be multiplied up to eight times in every student’s productive future, in his/her own development and society’s” (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2015, p. 3).*

Particularly, this definition of the relevance of ECE as a form of investment can be linked to what is understood as ‘social investment’ where ECE is viewed as a service that can promote the improvement of human capital through the development of specific skills deemed useful to the economic system (Adamson & Brennan, 2014). Thus, the economic relevance of ECE does not include solely an economic approach to this educational stage, but also a more humanistic approach that positions individuals as social actors that contribute to the development of society. In this sense, the policy makers and documents reviewed in this thesis reflect the complexity of this categorization of ECE, where the argument for economic relevance was also mentioned as a form of tension that relates to covert purposes of ECE and the fact that they are not made explicit by policy makers or policy design:

#### Excerpt 7

*“So, I think that is better to be more transparent and say, sure, it is made to improve the insertion of women to the workforce” (Policy Maker 1).*

So here, a specific economic benefit was claimed by this policy maker as ECE was viewed as a way of encouraging and enabling more women to enter the workforce. Additionally, as mentioned in Chapter 3, economic benefits were described as the main argument for ECE reforms and policies, and this was perceived by this stakeholder as possibly overshadowing other benefits that ECE has and which could be more important than economic arguments according to her view. It would appear then, that there was disagreement in terms of how important the economic benefit of ECE is, particularly between the stakeholders

interviewed, and what is described in the documents. Thus, official documents rely on economic evidence to promote the development of ECE reforms, while the stakeholders focused on other issues such as 'integral development' and social benefits regarding ECE. Nonetheless, similar to how the economic approach to ECE includes nuances and contradictions within its definition, the way in which policy makers and the documents analysed in this thesis define economic relevance of ECE also reflects complexities regarding how economic principles are put at the centre of the definition of ECE, especially in terms of its contribution to society.

Additionally, this interviewee described the policy design context as being very misogynistic, that is, that issues related to ECE are associated with care, and thus, with the role of women within a patriarchal discourse that underestimates such role based on the idea that ECE is a woman's domain, and so is not deserving of 'serious' (masculine) attention:

#### Excerpt 8

*"I think at a political level and still as a society, we are tremendously misogynistic. And this is still a women's subject...I think there are still few people that are really convinced...very few men leaders that are convinced of the relevance of this level. They keep seeing it as a subject for...for that girl there..." (Policy Maker 1).*

In this sense, she felt that people involved in policy design were more concerned about economic factors and benefits, and underestimate the value of ECE, related to a misogynist perspective on this educational level. This reflects wider findings. As Cannella and Viruru (2003) comment, ECE is still viewed as a 'feminine' educational stage, and thus, its importance is minimized and undervalued, associating it with 'feminine' attributes related to emotionality, which at the same time are rendered as less important or less measurable. It is perhaps unsurprising in this context that, economic aspects associated with 'masculine' traits such as rationalistic and scientific thinking are utilised as the main arguments to promote the importance of ECE for individual and societal development.

In sum, there seemed to be some level of consensus in recognizing the importance of ECE at different levels. However, when describing in detail why it becomes a relevant educational stage, tensions emerge in relation to who defines the importance of ECE, who is responsible for promoting its importance, and why it should be considered an important educational stage for children. Thus, even though in this study, ECE was positioned as a relevant stage, there is still lack of clarity as to why it is relevant and for whom.

#### **6.4 The Concept of Quality in Early Childhood Education**

This category includes general descriptions of what constitutes Quality for the stakeholders and for the official documents, as well as particular features of Quality in ECE, which relate to the characteristics that Quality ECE should have (which are not necessarily present in the Chilean context). This category was constructed in terms of what the interviewed participants and the documents described as necessary aspects to be included in the definition of Quality in ECE (whether it be explicitly stated or implied in a more implicit manner). Even though some of the concepts used to define features of Quality could be analysed on their own, it is important to highlight that in this study, they were mentioned as part of the concept of Quality, and thus, defined and described in relation to it.

##### **6.4.1 Quality: An Undefined Concept**

Firstly, there was consensus amongst the stakeholders interviewed in that the concept of Quality is undefined, at least at a local level. Moreover, it was described as an ambiguous and abstract concept:

###### Excerpt 09

*“Let’s see, I think the subject of quality in preschool education...well there’s no definition, which is clear, that’s why it’s so hard for us to take it into account” (Policy Maker 1).*

#### Excerpt 10

*“I think quality is a very abstract concept and it depends also on the area of intervention that you are within the system” (Policy Maker 2).*

#### Excerpt 11

*“To me quality is...I mean, obviously, I think it’s a super abstract concept that depends on the objectives that you have, whether there is quality or not” (Student Movement Leader).*

All interviewees agreed that the concept is undefined and abstract, and that its definition depends on other factors such as the stated objectives of education, the educational level where one is involved, and the social context in which one is embedded. In relation to this, the recognition of the ambiguity of the concept was similar to what is proposed by the international literature, specifically in terms of the role that social contexts play in the definition of the concept (Melhuish, 2001; Fenech & Sumsion, 2007; Prentice, 2009, UNICEF, 2000). This ambiguity and lack of definition was seen both as a positive as well as a negative aspect. In a positive manner, ambiguity was associated with flexibility and the possibility of constructing a more local and pertinent definition of the concept:

#### Excerpt 12

*“I think it is good that it has a margin of flexibility and that it is culturally defined” (Policy Maker 1).*

In this case, the undefined nature of the concept was related to what the literature commonly mentions as an important aspect to consider, namely, that Quality needs to be pertinent to the context in which it is defined (which is also mentioned as a feature of the concept of Quality, according to the stakeholders and documents analysed). On the other hand, in a negative manner, ambiguity was seen as a flaw in the sense that there is no coordination amongst institutions as to what constitutes Quality and furthermore, as to what is the aim of ECE and thus, how it can be improved:



### Excerpt 13

*“The thing is, I think we are still having a discussion about what we are understanding...and I don’t know how the conversations about the Intendancy<sup>18</sup> (of early childhood education) are being held or how they are handling it” (Policy Maker 2).*

In particular, this interviewee referred to the lack of information regarding the new institutions being created as a result of ECE reform, and how they are conceptualising Quality. According to this participant, there is an ongoing discussion as to what Quality stands for, not only in ECE but in education in general, and this was perceived by her as a troubling issue because it affects the policy design process and ultimately, its implementation. Though a level of ambiguity was again noted, there appears to be a lack of discussion as to why the concept is ambiguous, and why an undefined concept has so much significance in the discourse of education and ECE in particular.

### **6.4.2 Features of Quality**

As discussed in the previous category, even though there is consensus concerning the ambiguity of the concept, both stakeholders and the official documents describe very specific features that characterize Quality in ECE. These features were seen as relevant characteristics that should be present in order to recognize Quality in ECE. Similarly, such features can be identified within considerable body of research described by Dalli et al. (2011) as well as Logan et al. (2011), which can explain why some features that appear to be in contradiction, are mentioned by the participants and in the documents analysed as part of the same categorization of Quality in ECE.

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<sup>18</sup> The Intendancy of Early Childhood Education is one of the institutions created to promote accountability in the ECE system in Chile. This Intendancy is part of the Super-Intendancy of Education, institution that seeks to regulate and supervise the entire educational system in Chile.

## a) Equity

There was ample agreement to the effect that in order to achieve or even talk about Quality, it is necessary to also include the concept of Equity. Moreover, some participants argued that without talking about Equity, it is impossible to talk about Quality:

### Excerpt 14

*“Both concepts are very much linked. I mean, there is absolutely no chance of having equity if the quality of the education you are providing is not good, I mean, no chance...” (Policy Maker 1).*

### Excerpt 15

*“It happens that quality is absolutely linked with equity ...I mean if you don’t give universal access or if you don’t allow the same...the same quality for everyone, I think quality falls short...I mean for me it’s not quality, quality for a few...” (Policy Maker 2).*

According to the interviewees, Equity is an essential feature of Quality, and without pursuing it, it is impossible to achieve Quality of ECE. Similarly, when analysing what is said about Quality in the official documents, the very definition of the concept included the definition of Equity. In particular, the Bill that was presented in the congress proposing the ECE reform, states as one of its arguments, that the General Law of Education ‘consecrates’ as one of its main principles the achievement of Quality with Equity:

### Excerpt 16

*“The General Law of Education consecrates as a principle that quality of education must allow every child, regardless of their conditions and circumstances, to achieve the expected learning outcomes” (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2015, p. 2).*

Considered critically, the concepts of Quality and Equity that are mobilised here can be challenged in terms of their meaning, as both are defined in terms of how Education and specifically ECE contributes to society's development, a society that is intrinsically unequal. In this sense, there is a tension present in using the concept of Equity to define another concept (Quality) where the assumptions and beliefs that lie behind its conceptualisation are not made explicit (Alexander, 2008). In this sense, the definition remains equally ambiguous and obscured.

### **b) Holistic Development**

A second feature that emerged from the analysis is related to the idea that Quality in ECE involves the development of children's potential considered in its entirety. Interviewees described this as a right. They stated that Quality has to ensure that children achieve holistic development through ECE:

#### Excerpt 17

*"I think quality in preschool education from my perspective...has to do with...it has directly to do with the right to live, survival and full development...I mean, the duty of quality in education has to do with children developing their potential to the fullest, according to the stage in which he/she is" (Policy Maker 1).*

Additionally, holistic development was mentioned as one of the areas that are included in the discussion of current ECE reforms in Chile:

#### Excerpt 18

*"Ten work committees were developed together with JUNJI and Integra, with ten subjects: Bills, normative, enrolment rates, and the other seven which have to do with quality...flexible modalities, pedagogical teams, holistic well-being, curriculum and assessment, standards...space, and infrastructure" (Policy Maker 2).*

Similarly, in the Bill of ECE Reform, holistic development is also mentioned as one of its main objectives in terms of the realization of children as integral human beings, an aspect that is interestingly described as a way of ‘capitalizing’ the impact of ECE in Chile:

Excerpt 19

*“Under the above, the present Bill seeks to capitalize on the impact of quality early childhood education as the basis of a continuous and ongoing process that our legislation establishes and promotes, for a greater realization of the human person” (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2015, p. 5).*

What holistic development entails here, is a notion of human development as a process that includes different aspects (cognitive, emotional, physical and social elements). This relates to what was mentioned as relevant in ECE (‘Relevance at an individual level’), and thus, with the concept of development as a linear process that seeks the achievement of universal milestones, whether they are linked to cognitive, physical or emotional skills. Furthermore, the document that explains the reform in ECE currently taking place in Chile (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2015), configures the achievement of Quality as a way of capitalizing its impact, allowing children to develop their ‘full potential’ and contribute to society as ‘fully developed’ adults. In this sense, ‘holistic development’ could be paralleled to what is understood as the ‘humanistic approach’ to defining Quality, in that it includes aspects of emotional, social and cognitive development aspects (UNESCO, 2005). Specifically, as described in Chapter 3, the humanistic approach intends to incorporate ‘non-measurable’ and ‘subjective’ aspects of Quality, mostly related to socio-emotional development as well as processes involved in learning. However, the idea of measuring Quality and including standardized instruments to assess it are in an apparent contradiction with what this approach identifies as ‘subjective’ aspects of Quality. Thus, as discussed in Chapter 3, even though there is an attempt to differentiate between humanistic and economic approaches to Quality of Education and ECE in particular, it is necessary to acknowledge the complexity of this categorization, and the idea that humanistic approaches do not necessarily question economic features of Quality (such as measurability and

standardization for example), but rather they seek to 'complete' its vision in a more integral manner.

The complexities between humanistic and economic approaches to Quality can be observed in the definition stakeholders construct regarding 'holistic development', in which there appears to be an intention of including other features of 'development', while maintaining the idea that Quality is a measurable concept, describing it as subjective and universal at the same time. Thus, what is understood as 'holistic development' is ambiguous as well, where ideas such as holistic well-being and standardization seem to work together, with no clear explanation as to how it is possible to achieve integral development using standardized measures of Quality, or in assuming that the idea of development in itself relates to universal and rationalistic beliefs about knowledge.

### **c) Inclusion**

Another feature of Quality described by the participants and in the documents, is related to the concept of inclusion, and how Quality involves the idea of inclusiveness in the preschools and an argument for the development of inclusive policies. One of the stakeholders interviewed mentioned that Quality must ensure that the setting in which the child is immersed provides every opportunity available for him/her to achieve their full potential:

#### Excerpt 20

*"The environment needs to provide [the child with] every opportunity so that he/she develops to the fullest of its potential, whether it be a child that is deaf, blind, with one leg, or completely healthy" (Policy Maker 1).*

This reflects the idea that inclusion is also a paramount aspect of Quality, and that it is related to holistic development and Equity. From this position, it is not possible to talk about Quality if every child does not have the opportunity to achieve all his or her potential. The stakeholders interviewed mentioned these aspects as intertwined rather than separate features of the concept. It appears inclusion is seen as something that is measured by the number of children with

special needs that are attending preschool, but not necessarily focused on how inclusion is defined and put into practice. In this sense, inclusion is also an ambiguous concept, frequently invoked both by the interviewed stakeholders as well as the documents reviewed, but not clearly defined or described in terms of the specific purpose it is promoting.

#### **d) Contextual Nature**

A main feature of Quality described in this study has to do with its 'Contextual Nature'. It was argued that the concept needs to be defined and assessed locally, taking into account the specific setting and social context in which ECE is embedded. This feature was mentioned both by stakeholders as well as in the official documents, and it was portrayed as one of the key aspects to consider when defining Quality:

##### Excerpt 21

*"To me, quality in preschool education means, first of all, pertinent to the context, the needs and at the end...the objectives that should be defined together with the educational community, parents and also children" (Student Movement Leader).*

Drawing on what the participant mentioned then, 'Contextual Nature' could be described as defining policies for ECE that promote Quality, without losing the distinctiveness of the educational stage and incorporating the voice of all of the actors involved. In relation to this, the 'Contextual Nature' of Quality was mentioned as a concern by stakeholders in terms of how the reform of ECE will take this feature into account, and why it is important to include it in the discussions:

##### Excerpt 22

*"Entering the quality system in terms of...the Agency of Quality, and also the Intendancy I think is also going to allow us to have a different visualization, I mean we have on the one hand, an Intendancy that is going to demand that early childhood education is seen with a lot of precision in any educational establishment...and also having presence in the Agency of Quality will mean that*

*they are going to have to listen to early childhood educational matters from a logic of standards that are not necessarily the same as a school” (Policy Maker 2).*

Here, ‘Contextual Nature’ was configured slightly differently. It was associated by the interviewees with attending to the specific characteristics of ECE as an educational stage, and not necessarily to adapting the conceptualisation of Quality to specific local contexts. Thus, ‘Contextual Nature’ is still associated with standards, with a more homogeneous idea of what ECE is, and what dimensions should be measured to assess Quality. Lastly, and returning to the student movement leader, there was a concern regarding this feature in terms of the decisions that an ECE institution makes relating Quality aspects:

Excerpt 23

*“I think the fundamental thing is that, the decision that you make and the activities you carry out have to have meaning for every person that participates in them. I mean, sometimes children ask, why do I have to do this? It doesn’t make any sense...I think that dismissing that...because most of the time things are done due to external demands more than internal ones...” (Student Movement Leader).*

In this case, ‘Contextual Nature’ was associated again with the local contexts, and the idea that Quality depends on how each actor involved in ECE defines and understands the significance of this educational stage. Arguably, this emphasis on the importance of the ‘Contextual Nature’ of Quality can be related to the process of meaning-making proposed by Dahlberg et al. (1999), who describe it as a way in which key actors construct and discuss the meaning of the early childhood institutions and their projects, constantly defying concepts and ideas, and acknowledging its complexity and ‘provisionality’. Overall, it would seem that an emphasis on the ‘Contextual Nature’ of the concept of Quality, viewed as a local meaning-making process, is in direct tension to how it is described in the documents, and by the policy makers.

### **e) Measurability**

Lastly, Quality was characterized as a measurable concept, that is, a concept that should entail certain standards in order to be achieved. This feature could be viewed both as a positive aspect as well as a negative one (something that was only mentioned by the student movement leader).

#### Excerpt 24

*“If you don’t establish a standard...the ones that suffer the most are the poorer children, because children with a socio-cultural environment that stimulates them are always going to reach the goal” (Policy Maker 1).*

In this respect, standards and measurements were viewed as a way of ensuring that all children have access to Quality ECE. Thus, ‘Measurability’ was perceived as something that not only assesses the level of Quality but also promotes it. Additionally, it was believed that standards allow children from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds to achieve the same goals as children from more advantaged settings, because they ensure that different ECE institutions aim at the same objectives. Similarly, the official documents also mention assessment through standardized measures, as the main strategy of assuring Quality of ECE:

#### Excerpt 25

*“One of the first objectives of the Sub-secretary will be to create a National Plan for Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Education, with indicative performance standards for preschool education establishments and an accreditation system” (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2015, p. 4).*

This idea coincides with the international emphasis that has been given to promoting standardized measures to assess Quality in ECE (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Belfield, 2007; Currie & Neidell, 2007; Temple & Reynolds, 2007), as well as to argue for its relevance. In relation to this, there remains a scientific and universal approach to what constitutes Quality in ECE, and how it can be achieved. This is similar to how the importance of ECE is argued for within economic approaches as well as what is defined by Dalli et al. (2011) as the



second wave of research of Quality in ECE, where the main purpose is to measure those features that promote Quality, through the use of standardized and quantifiable instruments, arguably undermining other aspects and other definitions of Quality. In relation to this, although two of the stakeholders interviewed had a positive perception of measurement and standards, they did have concerns regarding their use and the pressures they exert in the establishments:

Excerpt 26

*“We have these standards called SIMCE... There’s pressure in the system...and under that logic the agents involved in the system try to respond to what the system demands as well, so I think there’s a cultural change that’s a lot slower than one would want and the reform processes are tough because in the end they break this logic and established structures” (Policy Maker 2).*

Thus, there was a perception that standardized measures are important and necessary, however, they place additional pressure on educational institutions where there is a risk of focusing solely on such standards, and not on other aspects related to ECE such as the idea of ‘Holistic Development’. Moreover, one of the interviewees went on to describe this feature as negative in general, especially in relation to the idea of standardized tests:

Excerpt 27

*“These global standards don’t make much sense to me, especially in early childhood education that has pertinence as one of its main objectives, so when we talk about general matters you lose one of its...of its fundamentals” (Student Movement Leader).*

Her perception of standardized tests was much more negative than the other stakeholders, as she considers these measures as almost irrelevant in an ECE context, because they go against one of the main features of this educational stage, that is, pertinence. She goes on by saying that this ‘culture of standardization’ pressures establishments to achieve certain goals:

### Excerpt 28

*“I really don’t know in concrete terms, what are the deadlines in terms of changes in institutional structure in preschool education but in general these structures of having a space that generates standards, another one that monitors, all of that...although they may have some kind of logic in a certain society project, what they have done in concrete in other educational levels is to pursue results, or to persecute people who do not meet certain results, and all the institutions are transformed into people trying to respond, to comply instead of building a project ...and basically own that project, instead is sort of running an errand so that the funds won’t be pulled out because they are already short and stuff like that” (Student Movement Leader).*

For this interviewee, standards and measurements were part of a specific vision of society and this vision does not allow for actors to be involved in the process of constructing a project of ECE that makes sense to them. Instead, they are forced to meet goals that are useful for other people and other objectives.

These opposing views regarding measurability of Quality in ECE, can be related to the waves of research defined by Dalli et al (2011), and expanded by Logan et al. (2011). Specifically, it is possible to see that while some of the stakeholders interviewed, defined measurement and standardization as a necessary element of Quality in ECE, the student movement leader questioned the purpose of using standardized measures and associated it with a specific definition of Quality. This is also reflected in Logan et al. (2011), where one of the earlier streams of research focused on measurement, while more recent streams of research have developed critical discussions surrounding the purpose of standardized assessments, and the discourses that are embedded when promoting those types of instruments to measure Quality. In this sense, the different views described by the stakeholders and documents reviewed coincide with the discussions developed within the research of Quality in ECE, reflecting the complexities found when defining the concept, where different opposing discourses function in parallel and obscure the limits of Quality as a concept within the ECE landscape.

In sum, although there appears to be consensus as to what are the main features of Quality, not only between the interviewed stakeholders but also in relation to the documents analysed and the policies they describe, there are also tensions as to how each of those features are defined and relate to one another. Firstly, it is interesting to note how there was agreement in how relevant Quality in ECE is, and how it is positioned at the centre of the discourse, regardless of how the stakeholders and the documents went on to conceptualize it. Secondly, it is also interesting that this apparent consensus includes tensions, especially as to how each of the *Features of Quality* are defined and described by the stakeholders and the documents analysed. Thus, as mentioned earlier on this Chapter, the ambiguity of the concept appears to be allowing for an idea of consensus, even though when explained in detail, important contradictions emerge.

Each of the concepts used to describe Quality revealed contradictions between the definitions given by the different stakeholders interviewed and the documents analysed. In a similar way, each of these features were not clearly defined, and they acted as ambiguously as how the concept of Quality was conceived. Furthermore, there is a contradiction in the fact that Quality seemed to be a defined/undefined concept at the same time, with a recognized ambiguity in its definition, as well as specific features that describe it. These features appear in the literature and are also recognized internationally as important aspects that have been widely investigated in overlapping waves of research that reflect different approaches to the definition of Quality (Dalli et al., 2011; Logan et al., 2011). However, these seem to be mentioned by the interviewees more as a way of validating the international evidence, lacking a clear definition or implication in the practice of ECE specifically in Chile. In this sense, and as discussed previously at the end of Chapter 3, Quality can be thought of in relation to the metaphor of an empty vessel that is filled with ambiguous descriptions and other 'empty vessels', obscuring the specific ideas and beliefs as well as the hegemonic discourse underlying the use of the concept at the centre of ECE discussions. Thus, at first, Quality appeared as a concept shared by different stakeholders and in line with ECE policies (which seems quite remarkable), nonetheless, when described in detail, a series of tensions emerge, giving way to the possibility of contesting the concept and the discourse embedded in its use.

## **6.5 Factors of Quality in Early Childhood Education**

The participants interviewed and the official documents mentioned a series of what I describe as '*Factors of Quality*', which can be defined as a series of conditions that need to be present in order for Quality to be achieved. Accordingly, I organized these factors around two dimensions: Structural matters such as materials or administrative aspects of ECE; and interactional aspects within the classroom, specifically, interactions that involve practitioners, who appear to be key actors when it comes to achieving Quality. Thus, I will describe firstly, the structural factors mentioned in this study, as well as the actors described as relevant in developing Quality ECE, with a special focus on practitioners as the main actors described by all the stakeholders interviewed as well as the analysed documents (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2010, 2015).

### **6.5.1 Structural Factors of Quality**

As discussed in Chapter 3, structural factors relate mainly to those described by the literature when attempting to define Quality in ECE, that is, aspects of the functioning of an ECE institution and the variables that allow for a 'proper' development of the purposes of ECE (Inter-American Development Bank, 2006). Below I discuss the structural factors that were identified in this research.

#### **a) Institutionalality**

Institutionality was mentioned as a factor of Quality by the official documents, as a form of justification for the educational reform. It was described as an indispensable factor that can help achieve quality:

### Excerpt 29

*“[O]rganizational components have remained invariable in our early childhood education system. Today, it is necessary to make significant changes in the institutional conditions in which our system has operated. This is a basic requirement to move forward towards a better quality of Early Childhood Education.” (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2015, p. 2).*

According to the documents reviewed, institutionality is perceived as the basis from which a Quality ECE system can be built. In this sense, ‘Institutionality’ was mentioned as a ‘*Factor of Quality*’ in that without the proper structural conditions for its organization, Quality is not possible to achieve. This aspect coincides with previous diagnoses made by different authorities relating to the structure of ECE in Chile, and, as I mentioned previously in Chapter 2, taking into account the multiplicity of roles amongst the different institutions involved in ECE (Dirección de Presupuestos, 2008; Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2013).

### **b) Materials**

Materials were also mentioned as ‘*Factors of Quality*’, in relation to the type of educational materials that are available for children.

### Excerpt 30

*“I think the quality of the educational materials is important, the quality of books...” (Policy Maker 1).*

However, this aspect was mostly mentioned when accompanied by other factors that appear as more relevant, such as practitioners (which will be described later in this section). Thus, even though this is an aspect included in the literature as an important structural aspect of Quality in ECE, in this study, it was not mentioned as something relevant on its own, rather, it was framed as an additional aspect that can help promote Quality when accompanied by other factors.

## **6.5.2 Key Actors as a Factor of Quality**

This subcategory describes two main factors related to specific actors involved in ECE in Chile, that is, families and practitioners. On the one hand, families were viewed as a Quality factor at different levels, whether it be in building strong relationships between families and ECE providers, helping them develop parental skills, or socializing them into understanding the relevance of ECE. On the other hand, practitioners were considered as the main factor of Quality and furthermore, other factors mentioned are subordinated to this factor, that is, if adequate conditions related to practitioners and their performance are not present, then the other factors are not seen as important on their own.

### **a) Relationship with Families**

Three ways in which ‘Relationship with Families’ was mentioned by the Stakeholders and official documents in three distinct ways, that is, in terms of building partnerships with them, in developing parenting skills, and in socializing parents into understanding the importance of ECE.

#### **1. Building Partnerships with Parents**

The ability to build partnerships with parents and the wider community was mentioned as an important factor. This was described by a policy maker and by the student movement leader, with different takes on why this is important. On the one hand, the policy maker mentioned that partnerships with families are relevant as a factor of Quality as they allow for the strengthening of ECE by incorporating families into the educational process:

#### Excerpt 31

*“We did a big job defining the policy with families in preschools with concrete actions to work with the practitioners as to how to incorporate families and the strategies for parent-teacher meetings” (Policy Maker 1).*

This interviewee perceived that promoting the participation of families in the educational setting was a relevant 'Factor of Quality'. In this sense, strong partnerships with parents and families help promote a Quality ECE environment. On the other hand, the Student Movement Leader mentioned these partnerships as relevant in terms of reinforcing relationships that allow for socially constructing ECE, including every actor involved in the process. She argued that:

### Excerpt 32

*"The relationship with families, with the educational community of the preschool or school where children attend, is very relevant because basically they are related to the dynamics, the ways of socially constructing that are being generated in preschool education...and this obviously affects the cognitive and emotional development of children...all of that" (Student Movement Leader).*

In relation to this, this interviewee perceived participation of families in the educational process more as a form of socially constructing ECE rather than a way of promoting specific strategies. Thus, her view was more related to what Dahlberg et al. (1999) describe as 'meaning making', where every actor is involved in defining and making sense of ECE. However, what was understood by the policy maker in terms of the importance of including families in the educational process, had to do with a more strategic approach, where partnerships with families were viewed as a way of promoting the achievement of specific objectives, not necessarily meaning that families participate in the process of defining such objectives.

## 2. Developing Parenting Skills

This was the most mentioned aspect when it came to 'Relationships with Families'. The importance in terms of achieving Quality ECE was related with 'teaching' parents about being 'good' parents. This was mentioned both as a form of supporting the work done in the preschool, as well as another form of ECE (in particular when the child stays at home). One of the stakeholders mentioned the following:

### Excerpt 33

*“I think the strengths have to be placed in teaching parents and families, because the younger the child or at least in the first stage of preschool, we should have a strong emphasis in teaching the families.” (Policy Maker 2).*

The development of parenting skills was viewed as a form of teaching parents and families ‘to be parents’. In this sense, there appeared to be a perception that parents need to learn certain skills that are key to ECE, and this is an important factor that can assure Quality. There appeared to be a belief that there is one ‘proper’ way of parenting, and that parents need to be taught these rules for them to apply them in their contexts. Thus, parents were positioned as ‘inferior’ in terms of their abilities and knowledge about raising their children, similar as to how neo-colonial ideologies position disadvantaged groups, and children in particular (Cannella & Viruru, 2003). Specifically, parents are positioned as disadvantaged in that they lack the necessary skills to guide children in their development.

In relation to this, James, Jenks and Prout (1998) argue that educational institutions operate in a way that allows them to control and monitor children’s development, by teaching them how and what to ‘know’. In this sense, the same could be argued for how stakeholders and the documents analysed in this thesis describe parenting skills, and the need to ‘teach’ parents how to raise their children.

### 3. Socializing the importance of ECE

This was mentioned both by policy makers and the official documents as an important factor of Quality. The need to promote ECE in families and socialize them into understanding why this stage is important was described as an important strategy that conduces to achieving Quality ECE.



#### Excerpt 34

*“What you can do there with the families, how to help them understand why it’s important that they participate in the educational process, what that means, how you accompany them, that they see the educational institution as a collaborator and not a judge...as a hostile actor, I think it’s key” (Policy Maker 1).*

Similarly, the Bill of Early Childhood Education Reform mentions as part of the objectives of the new Sub-secretary of Early Childhood Education (the main institution created with this reform), to promote preschool education as an important educational stage amongst families:

#### Excerpt 35

*“Also, it will oversee the coordination of public services in the area that provides such educational level as well as promoting and fostering, in the different levels of society, especially families, preschool education as an early start of children’s learning process” (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2015, p. 8).*

In this context it seems as though, families were viewed as an important and strategic ally in promoting the relevance of ECE, especially in terms of preschool attendance. Nonetheless, how families were positioned in terms of their role in ECE, is still passive, that is, families and parents were viewed as needing to be ‘taught’ how to participate in their children’s education, how to ‘be parents’ of their children, and how to recognize the importance of ECE. Thus, there appears to be a tension as to how the stakeholders interviewed and the documents analysed positioned families as an important actor, and at the same time, relegated their participation to servicing ends defined by others, in this case, those who are in charge of designing ECE policies. As I mentioned previously in the category of *Relevance of ECE*, parents were seen by the ‘official discourse’ as consumers of a specific service, and also as a group that is in some way ignorant as to what being a ‘good parent’ is. This in turn, further deepens an unequal power relation between those who design and implement ECE policies, and the families of the children attending ECE. Similarly, it is also possible to see that the idea of ‘universality’ is present when describing families as an important aspect of Quality in ECE, where how parents get involved in ECE is guided by the assumption of

a 'proper' way of educating their children, a way that again, is established by others, by those who are in power, and by those who maintain and establish 'truths' about ECE, and education in general.

## **b) Practitioners**

Practitioners were described in this study as the most important factor in securing Quality in ECE. They were indeed, generally positioned as one of the key actors involved in promoting Quality in ECE, as well as the key agents responsible for achieving it. This might strike some as somewhat obvious. For who indeed could deny that ECE practitioners do not have an important role. Nonetheless, as I outline below and in subsequent Chapters, this central positioning of practitioners is not necessarily to their benefit, or to the benefit of ECE.

### Excerpt 36

*"The practitioner is key; by far they are the most important factor. I mean, you can work in a room with a floor of dirt and the child can work fine if the practitioner is good" (Policy Maker 1).*

In this extraordinary quote, practitioners were described as the key element to promote and achieve Quality in ECE. Furthermore, for the participants in this study, all other factors mentioned were conditional on how the practitioner exercised his/her role inside the preschool. Moreover, it appears as though practitioners can take responsibility for children's education and serve it well, regardless of their working conditions, the materials they have at their disposal, and the context in which they develop their role. The central importance given to the practitioners was mentioned in different ways.

The features mentioned by stakeholders and in the documents analysed for this thesis, can be related to what is described by the literature as process features linked to the practitioner's role. Specifically, Rolla & Rivadeneira (2006) describe Quality practitioners as those who: a) Are professionally trained to implement Quality pedagogical approaches, that is, they hold a professional degree in ECE; b) They are able to describe the curriculum with which they work, both in terms

of their strengths and the way in which they implement it; c) They are capable of referring students with problems, to be properly diagnosed by another professional; d) They are paid a fair salary and have opportunities to develop skills and develop in their profession; and, e) they are systematically assessed through a specific ECE assessment program. In this sense, stakeholders in this study also mention issues such as practitioners' working conditions, pedagogical interactions and skills as some of the main factors that promote Quality ECE. Moreover, international investigations describe effective preschool programs as those which involve direct interactions between professional practitioners and children (Alarcón, Castro, Frites & Gajardo, 2015; Moloney, 2010). Additionally, they describe the role of the practitioner as pivotal in the development of Quality ECE settings, both in political and social terms.

### 1. The Role of the Practitioner

I defined this first category, the 'Role of the Practitioner', in terms of how important it was to the stakeholders interviewed, how practitioners themselves were said to define their role, and how much they recognized its relevance to achieving Quality:

#### Excerpt 37

*"I think that actually practitioners and teachers in general, but in particular early childhood practitioners, have the idea that they are not there to transfer contents or knowledge and in fact it would be absurd that a practitioner would present him/herself in that manner, so the role of a practitioner has much more to do with forming people and communities" (Student Movement Leader).*

For this participant, the role of the practitioner was perceived by educators as more than just transmitting knowledge, but a role that influences how human beings and communities are defined. In this sense, there seemed to be an idea that the role of practitioners is a major 'Factor of Quality' because it allows them to be involved in forming people and societies. Particularly, the importance of the role of practitioners as a factor of Quality was described in two ways, a social and a political role. A social role was described mostly in terms of the importance that

practitioners have in contributing to the co-construction of society, and how they themselves view this role. In this sense, practitioners as a factor in Quality was associated with recognizing their social role and its importance in developing societies. There was also a perception that practitioners have a political role that is relevant in terms of promoting and achieving Quality. For the stakeholders, the idea of including practitioners in political decisions acts as a 'Factor of Quality' because it allows policies to be constructed from a practitioner's perspective and not only from an economic perspective. Similarly, practitioners were seen as political actors in terms of participating in their unions and promoting Quality policies in ECE:

#### Excerpt 38

*"Practitioners are very reflexive people and thus, the union aspect of the job has to be present" (Policy Maker 2).*

#### Excerpt 39

*"I think the true contribution or the difference is made when the same practitioner's organizations get together and take voice in general. That has much more weight than what a teaching student has to say..." (Student Movement Leader).*

Regarding this last point, this participant described practitioners' role within ECE as relevant in terms of their influence both at a political as well as a societal level. In this sense, the role of the practitioner appears to be viewed as the main factor in achieving Quality ECE, and not only that, but also in constructing a better society in the country. There is agreement in this aspect. There was a perception that practitioners should be much more involved in the process of designing and constructing a common view of ECE in Chile. Interestingly though, when Quality was described by the participants in terms of its features, practitioners were not mentioned as having an important role in defining the pertinence of the concept, the development of measures to assess Quality, the implementation of inclusive practices, the promotion of holistic development, etc. Thus, there appears to be an image of the practitioner as a relevant actor in achieving Quality, but not in the process of defining what Quality is.

## 2. Working Conditions

In relation to the importance of practitioners as a factor of Quality, stakeholders mentioned working conditions as a relevant aspect that supports the job practitioners have to do. In this sense, working conditions were considered important as they can improve practitioners' situation in the preschool, and thus, foster Quality through their work. Working conditions were also mentioned as an important part in terms of the possibilities they might give practitioners to engage in reflexive practices (if they have good working conditions, they can have spaces such as this).

### Excerpt 40

*“Thus, it is also important how this person is treated by its institution. I think it’s sort of a chain and you have to look at it in a systemic manner...in order for a child to...in order to achieve quality in the work you do with a child, the person has to be content with his/her job, and needs to be treated right and have development opportunities. The practitioner is key.” (Policy Maker 1).*

### Excerpt 41

*“We have on the one hand quality, that has mainly to do with the pedagogical team, so if you have a tired pedagogical team and with little time to reflect on their practices, and additionally with a very heterogeneous training that many times does not have the essentials, a system is created that you basically have to help in every area” (Policy Maker 2).*

As practitioners were viewed as the key factor of Quality, their working conditions also acted as a factor of Quality in that it affected and influenced the way in which practitioners will develop their work in the classroom, and ultimately, how they will help promote Quality in ECE. This also relates to practitioners' political and social role, in that their working conditions reflect the importance given to their job. However, practitioners were still situated in a passive position in terms of the working conditions in which they are inserted, generally described in terms of the importance of 'giving' practitioners a good place to work, and 'treating' them in a respectful manner, without mentioning the role of practitioners in demanding

these conditions (with the exception of the mention of unions by one of the interviewees). Additionally, when the role of practitioners was described, stakeholders interviewed highlighted the fact that the importance of their job is so great, that whatever the conditions in which they have to work, practitioners can still promote Quality in ECE, almost as if in their role, resides the entire definition of Quality in ECE. Thus, the tension between how practitioners are held responsible for achieving Quality, and how they are positioned as passive recipients of specific policies and work conditions, reflects the ambiguity with which the 'official discourse' represented in this study by the stakeholders interviewed and the documents analysed, referred to practitioners, and it also shows a gap between the demands that are made of teachers, and the elements they are given to work with.

### 3. Pedagogical Interactions

Another aspect of practitioners as a factor of Quality was related to the pedagogical interactions in which they are directly involved. In this sense, practitioners were described as the key factor that can develop Quality interactions with children:

#### Excerpt 42

*"The learning opportunities in terms of stimulating discussion, conversation between children, questions that you ask...all of that is fostered by the practitioner I think" (Policy Maker 1).*

Regarding this aspect, it appears the practitioners have the role of fostering and developing the necessary skills in children that will allow them to engage in stimulating discussions. Similarly, another interviewee also stressed the importance of pedagogical interactions:

#### Excerpt 43

*"Pedagogical quality for me is essential... I think pedagogical practices can be achieved without so much material... I think it has more to do with the interactions the adult develops with the child" (Policy Maker 2).*

Here, it was highlighted again that practitioners, and in this case, pedagogical practices exercised by practitioners are key, and that other factors of Quality can be spared if necessary, as long as the pedagogical practices remain. This can be associated with the ideas developed by Logan et al. (2011), regarding the measurement of structural and process features as a way to assess Quality in ECE. In this sense, the pedagogical interactions that practitioners have with children are positioned at the centre of Quality in ECE, even more than structural features such as infrastructure and materials. Nonetheless, practitioners were once again mentioned in a passive manner, as the pedagogical practices described seem to be defined by other organisations, or at least in a general and standardized manner, and they do not include personal characteristics or local aspects of the setting in which practitioners are immersed.

#### 4. Skills

Another relevant aspect mentioned was related to the skills that practitioners need to have to promote Quality in ECE. In this sense, two major aspects were mentioned; cognitive skills, described mostly as disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge that practitioners need to have in order to achieve Quality; and socio-emotional skills, that were mentioned as equally important, if not more important than cognitive skills, and are related to empathy, affection and attachment.

#### Excerpt 44

*“The adult in charge has to be a highly competent person that really knows what he/she is working with” (Policy Maker 1).*

Here, even though these remarks could be also associated with initial training and how these skills are promoted by institutions, there was a perception that such skills must be developed by the practitioners, regardless of their training. These skills were mentioned as part of the features of a practitioner. However, there were also comments regarding how the teaching profession should also foster the development of such skills:

#### Excerpt 45

*“A rigorous teaching profession based on established and organized knowledge, structured, with a very clear logic and with foundations as to why things are done and under what logic” (Policy Maker 2).*

Additionally, one of the interviewees emphasizes the importance of developing not only cognitive but socio-emotional skills as well:

#### Excerpt 46

*“Very empathetic, with the ability of connecting, of bonding with children, I think that...I believe a lot in the initial training in terms of competencies...but I think you can have a PhD in early childhood education, and be a very cold practitioner and I don't know if that's going to be...I mean I think that human quality is very important” (Policy Maker 1).*

Here, socio-emotional skills were perceived as even more relevant than cognitive skills, or at least, as an essential part of what a practitioner should have to promote Quality in ECE. In relation to this, there appears to be another tension relating which skills are most relevant and how such skills are put into practice by the practitioners. On the one hand, there was mention of the importance of initial training in developing specific pedagogical and cognitive skills in practitioners, while on the other hand, there was also a perception that some of the skills practitioners need to have, are more related to personal characteristics rather than ‘teachable’ contents. In this sense, practitioners remained in an ambiguous position where they moved from being passive actors that are given a set of rules and strategies to implement, to active participants that get into the ECE system carrying a set of specific skills and abilities needed to promote Quality ECE. In this regard, a study conducted in Chile by Zapata & Ceballos (2010) mentions that even though institutions that train practitioners include the development of socio-emotional skills in the description of their professional profile, they are not included in the competencies developed in the curriculum. In this sense, it could be argued that practitioners are expected to develop certain skills by themselves, supporting what was found in the “official discourse” analysed in this study.



Thus, there was no clarity as to how each of the aspects related to practitioners as a factor of Quality are to be developed, whose responsibility it is to develop such aspects, and how practitioners exercise their role within ECE. Additionally, when it comes to defining socio-emotional skills, the stakeholders interviewed seemed to describe such skills as if they were inherent to the practitioners, as 'gifts', or 'ethereal qualities' that cannot be taught, but can be clearly recognized in a person. Thus, practitioners once again are demanded to have a set of skills, with little clarity as to how to develop such skills. In relation to this, a study developed in Chile by Zapata & Ceballos (2010) analysed the perceptions of different stakeholders regarding the preschool teaching profession. One of their conclusions mentioned that the role of the practitioner or "auntie" is usually described from a vocational perspective, prioritizing their passion for their work, and most of all, emotional relationships and the "love they feel for the children" (p.1076).

Closely related to how practitioners were viewed and positioned within the promotion of Quality in ECE in this study, when it comes to assessing their role, stakeholders interviewed seemed to agree in the fact that even though there have been improvements, the teaching profession still has a lot of challenges to address:

Excerpt 47

*"I would say that there are advances in terms of the challenges of professionalization, or more concern from the academic institutions, I think that the practitioner's profile has improved." (Policy Maker 1).*

In particular, this interviewee referred to improvements in how the practitioner's profile has been perfected over the last years, allowing for a more complete training for practitioners. Similarly, she also mentioned that pedagogical practices have improved over the last years:

#### Excerpt 48

*“What they are doing inside the classroom...JUNJI and Integra...it’s a lot better than what they did ten years ago, ...” (Policy Maker 1).*

Accordingly, another interviewee believed that improvements have also been made in ongoing training opportunities:

#### Excerpt 49

*“I think now there are good dispositions in terms of being able to accompany, there is a teaching plan that’s being put together, a teaching decree under that same logic, a teaching career in terms of the worker as a union...” (Policy Maker 2).*

Regardless of what the interviewed stakeholders mentioned in relation to practitioners’ training, they also identified challenges, especially in how the contents are delivered to practitioners, and the depth with which they are taught:

#### Excerpt 50

*“I think we still need to improve quality in initial training for practitioners” (Policy Maker 1).*

Similarly, another interviewee commented that even though heterogeneity in training could be seen as a good thing in terms of diversity, in this case, it is a challenge because the level of Quality of training is very unequal, and this means that practitioners have very dissimilar knowledge regarding ECE:

#### Excerpt 51

*“The initial training is very heterogeneous, implying that besides this heterogeneity that could be very interesting in terms of diversity, there’s also heterogeneity in terms of learning levels or performance in practitioners” (Policy Maker 2).*

Consequently, the lack of training in practitioners is also reflected in how their practice is assessed within preschool settings. For instance, a series of investigations developed in the country have highlighted the need to promote Quality training in practitioners, especially in terms of pedagogical practices, taking into account that the results have been consistently lower in this area, particularly in preschool settings coming from vulnerable contexts (Alarcón et al., 2015; Pizarro & Espinoza, 2016).

In this sense, training of practitioners was viewed as a challenge by the participants of this study, in that even though they appeared as one of the most important 'Factors of Quality', their education lacks depth and specialization, an aspect that ultimately influences their identity, and how much they value their role within education. Particularly, the Student Movement Leader described the lack of appreciation of the role of practitioners as a major challenge:

Excerpt 52

*"There's people who think that it's not even a profession, I mean like...I've been talking to people who don't understand why I have to do a thesis in preschool education, I mean why do you have to create knowledge if you should go out and do...I don't know...cut paper..." (Student Movement Leader).*

This interviewee believed that the esteem given to practitioners is very low in the country, and this affects the Quality of ECE because practitioners are not respected as much as they should be in their role as contributors to the co-construction of society. In this sense, she mentioned that practitioners are not seen as producers of knowledge, much less as relevant actors in forming human beings. Instead, they are seen more as caretakers, and this relates to what another interviewee mentioned regarding a misogynistic perspective around ECE, where this educational stage is viewed merely as a space to take care of children rather than educating them. Similarly, the Student Movement Leader also believed that the identity of practitioners is diminished, and that even practitioners themselves do not believe they are doing a relevant job, which ultimately affects the Quality of their work in the classroom:

### Excerpt 53

*“There is a level of non-appreciation in the abilities practitioners have, the decisions they make, and that many times also affects the vision they themselves have of their job...it was very troubling for me because I felt that some of my classmates, like they were not empowered or didn’t realize how important the role of practitioners was” (Student Movement Leader).*

For her, this was a challenge because it also affects the way in which policies relating ECE are defined, that is, practitioners are not empowered enough to get involved in decision making processes and thus, policy design is left to people who are not directly involved in the education process itself:

### Excerpt 54

*“People even inside preschool education, like, in many universities these are careers that are not that well organized or politicized to be able to make a national proposal for education” (Student Movement Leader).*

In this sense, once again the role of practitioners is relegated to following guidelines and policies designed by others who are not directly involved in ECE. However, here, the student movement leader recognized this situation and saw it as a challenge in terms of how practitioners are positioned.

As practitioners were viewed as being one of the main factors that influence how Quality is achieved (or not), they were also positioned passively when conceptualising Quality in ECE. There was some recognition of the fact that their role lacks the prestige it perhaps deserves, and that their skills are not being developed as they should. However, there was also a perception that practitioners need to be taught these things, rather than positioning them in a more active role (given that they are the most important factor to achieve Quality). Thus, practitioners were often made accountable for the results of ECE, but at the same time, their role is downplayed as active participants of the system.

## 6.6 Summary of Chapter

Two main tensions appear to be emerging from the 'official discourse' as represented by the interviewed stakeholders and analysed documents, that is, the tension between the undefined/defined nature of the concept in general, and the tension between the passive role given to the practitioner and how they are positioned as the main actor involved in the achievement of Quality in ECE.

Regarding the undefined/defined nature of the concept, as I mentioned previously in this Chapter, there is tension between how the interviewed stakeholders described the concept as ambiguous and hard to define, while mentioning specific features that characterize Quality in ECE. Thus, as Dahlberg et al. (1999) propose, the use of the concept and its positioning at the core of educational reforms appears to be related to a broader discourse developed around ideas of 'development', 'progress', 'standards', and 'universality', among others, that is, a largely rationalistic and economic discourse of education. However, as the concept has shifted from its explicit economic context, to a context centred around social services such as education, its links to the rationalistic discourse have been obscured, and the concept of Quality has been emptied of meaning (at least this is how it appears), while at the same time, appropriated by different stakeholders, regardless of the values and ideas each of them promote. Nonetheless, the specific features mentioned in this study as relevant to the definition of Quality in ECE seem to be closely related to what the international literature describes as characteristics of the concept, especially in terms of structure and process features. In this sense, when it comes to attempting a definition of Quality, the concept is again positioned within a more universal and standardized discourse of education, where certain guidelines are described as necessary to 'achieve' Quality (as if it was something objective that can be accomplished by following a series of steps) by international institutions as well as European and North American academics and researchers.

In relation to practitioners, there appears to be a tension when it comes to the role they play in ECE, and how the 'official discourse' situates them in contradictory positions within a discourse that establishes them as the main actors responsible for 'achieving' Quality. Although there appears to be a shared notion of how important practitioners are when developing practices that help promote Quality ECE, the conceptualisation given by stakeholders and official documents seems to show that the skills they demand of practitioners must be almost innate, and developed individually by each practitioner. Thus, practitioners on the one hand, were positioned as key actors in 'achieving' Quality, but on the other hand, they were relegated to a position of executors of policies designed by others. In a similar way, there appears to be an idea that practitioners can 'achieve' Quality almost by themselves, even if other features of Quality are not present. Nonetheless, they were positioned in a passive role, where how practitioners put policies into practice is established through external actors (politicians and policy makers for example), who use external categorizations of what Quality is, employing external standardized instruments to measure their performance.

I will expand on both ideas in Chapter 8, relating these tensions to how children's experience of preschool is described by the children in this study, and how both discourses are embedded within a broader discourse of neoliberal policies at the centre of educational reforms.

## **Chapter 7. Making Sense of ECE Through the Voice of Children**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The present Chapter will focus on the analysis of the information gathered through a series of activities developed in the preschool classroom chosen as the case study. As my methodological approach was an interpretive and critical one, it is important for me to show the process of analysis and results along with the discussion towards such results, recognizing that the reflection and analysis was present not only at the analysis stage, but throughout the whole research study. Similarly, developing research with children also taught me the way in which they tell their stories is not necessarily as linear and straightforward as an adult might tell a story, and thus, the categories that are explained here are in a way, artificial, since all of them interact and are intertwined as a constant flow of interactions and feelings. As such, the categories outlined below serve only as a way of organizing the information, and for that reason, developing the analysis and discussion in parallel allows me to describe what children's views are, and how they constructed meanings about their preschool, recognizing the partiality of my interpretation as a researcher.

Specifically, this phase of the analysis focuses on the second part of the main research question, through the following complementary question:

- 2) How do children in this study construct meaning in relation to their ECE experience?

Firstly, I will briefly describe the data incorporated into this part of the analysis, as well as the context in which the case study was embedded, to situate the analysis in the broader setting. Secondly, I will describe the categories that arose from the analysis, and how they relate to each other and to the theory. Lastly, I will summarize the analysis, and I will reflect on the categories and their interconnections, to make way for the next Chapter that will discuss in depth, the tensions and commonalities between the official discourse relating to the concept of Quality in ECE, and the conceptualisations children have.

## 7.2 Data gathering and analysis

As described in the methodology Chapter, I conducted a thematic analysis to understand and interpret children's experiences of preschool in a preschool setting in Chile. My aim was to organise emerging themes arising from the various ways in which children expressed their views and perspectives in this study, including my own interpretations of their experiences. Thus, I focused on the information gathered by the following tools<sup>19</sup>:

- Fieldnotes of non-recorded and recorded observations of the classroom activities
- Video transcripts of 8 recorded observations in the classroom.
- Transcripts of informal interviews with the 4 participating children in the album activity.
- Fieldnotes of the photograph activity.
- Fieldnotes of the album making activity.
- Children's albums (including photographs, drawings and writings from the children)

Each of the sources were analysed by using thematic analysis, looking at the common aspects and developing emerging categories and themes that accounted for the ways in which children make sense and construct meaning of their experience in their preschool.

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<sup>19</sup> The activities and data gathering tools used for the analysis of children's experiences were explained in detail in Chapter 5.



### 7.3 Context of the Study

It is important to understand the general structure of ECE currently being implemented in the country, and how this study and the participants included in it are embedded in this structure.

Early Childhood or Preschool Education (used indistinctly) is the first level of the Chilean educational system and includes children from 3 months to 6 years old, divided into 3 main levels, with 2 sublevels each, as table 7.1 shows. ECE is non-compulsory from 3 months to 4 years 11 months, and compulsory for children between 5 and 5 years 11 months. It is the State's responsibility to provide and guarantee access to education for children under 3 years belonging to the 60% of the country's more vulnerable families<sup>20</sup>, and to ensure universal education from 3 years onwards<sup>21</sup> (Ministerio de Educación, 2013).

Age	Name of Level	Name of Sublevel
<b>3 months to 11 months</b>	Nursery Level	Minor Nursery (Sala Cuna Menor)
<b>1 year to 1 year, 11 months</b>		Major Nursery (Sala Cuna Mayor)
<b>2 years to 2 years, 11 months</b>	Middle Level	Minor Middle (Medio Menor)
<b>3 years to 3 years, 11 months</b>		Major Middle (Medio Mayor)
<b>4 years to 4 years, 11 months</b>	Transition Level	First Level of Transition (Primer Nivel de Transición/PreKinder)
<b>5 years to 5 years, 11 months</b>		Second Level of Transition (Segundo Nivel de Transición/Kinder)

**Table 7.1** Age and name of each educational level in ECE.

<sup>20</sup> The State has targeted policies for the most vulnerable families of the country. For children coming from less vulnerable families (40% of the population), the offer is divided between subsidized and private schools.

<sup>21</sup> To ensure universal access for children over 3 years old means that the Chilean State has to provide quotas in the public educational system for every child that wants to attend preschool.

Provision of ECE for children between 3 months and 3 years 11 months is mainly organized around two institutions: The National Board of Preschool Institutions (Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles, from now on JUNJI), and Integra Foundation (Dirección de Presupuestos, 2008). Both institutions focus on the provision of education (both directly administered and via third parties) for children belonging to the most vulnerable families in Chile, identified as 60% of the population (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2001, 2013). The same way, both institutions receive funding from the state, where JUNJI receives direct funding from the national budget, and Integra Foundation receives funding through the Ministry of Education in the form of a collaboration agreement (Dirección de Presupuestos, 2008). Additionally, JUNJI is also in charge of the inspection of public preschools, and of private preschools through a voluntary certification process.

The provision of public ECE for children between 4 and 5 years 11 months, is mainly delivered by municipal schools (administered by municipal councils) and subsidized schools (administered by private organisations), where the latter receive funding from the State in the form of vouchers and are subject to the fulfilment of the regulations stipulated by the State (Cox, 2005, 2012; Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2013). Finally, private institutions can also provide ECE, either in the form of nurseries, preschools, or private schools that include preschool levels. They don't receive funding from the State and in the case of nurseries and preschools, they only need authorization from the municipal council to function (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2013). Additionally, every company that employs 20 or more female workers, has to provide a nursery independent from the place of work, to allow women to feed their children under 2 years of age, and leave them while they are at work (Ministerio de Educación Chile, 2013).

The preschool selected for this study corresponds to one of the educational institutions administered directly by JUNJI, and it is situated at the Municipality of El Bosque, in the south of Santiago, the capital of Chile. This Municipality has approximately 165.000 inhabitants, where 11,1% of the population is classified as being poor (a percentage similar to the national rate). Additionally, the average monthly income is inferior to the national and regional average (Ministerio de

Desarrollo Social Chile, 2014). Specifically, the selected preschool has an enrolment of 220 children from nursery to First Level of Transition, with a total capacity of 250 children enrolled. In relation to the professionals working at the preschool, from a total of 43, 10 are practitioners and 23 are teaching assistants (JUNJI, 2017).

#### **7.4 Children's Views About Quality in ECE: Making Sense of the Preschool.**

The thematic categories that I will now describe, were organized according to how children make sense of their preschool, and of their experiences within the classroom. The categories intend to describe children's experiences in terms of how they construct 'meaning' in an in relation to ECE, focusing in particular on what they value about their experience both in a positive as well as a negative manner. In this sense, it is important to understand that the purpose of this study was to understand the wider experience of preschool from the perspective of the children involved in the classroom analysed, and not to reduce their experience to a narrow conceptualisation of Quality. Moreover, even though some of the categories constructed by me as an adult researcher (attempting to interpret children's perspectives of their ECE experience) can be related to structure and process dimensions described by the literature as relevant when developing Quality ECE spaces, it is important to acknowledge that it is not the intention of this thesis to define children's experience of preschool according to these categorizations, but rather to widen its analysis, emphasizing the particularities in the way in which children in this study make meaning of their ECE setting, as well as critically analysing its relation to broader discourses of Quality. In this sense, in the following Chapter, I will discuss how children's experience of preschool can be related to what the 'official discourse' (as defined and described in Chapter 6) conceptualizes as Quality, and how children's voices are included (or not) in such conceptualisation.

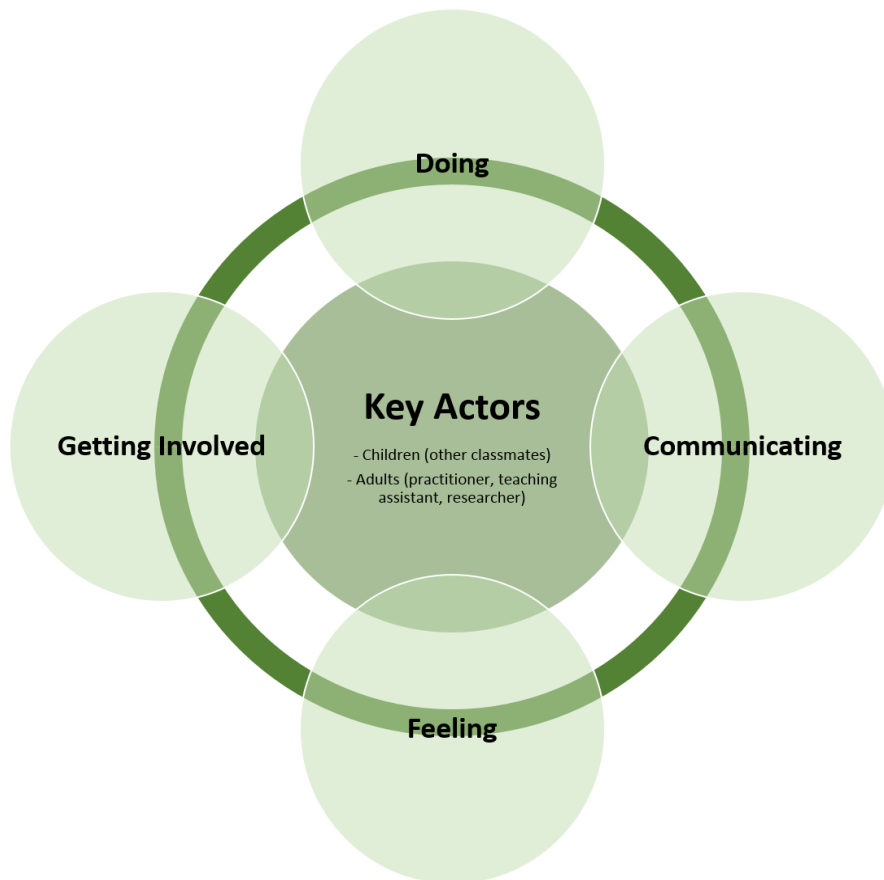
Children do not engage in conversations the same way as adults do. Thus, the way in which they construct meaning and share their experiences with others is also different (Harcourt, 2011; Theobald & Kultti, 2012). The use of categories to organize information as thematic analysis does, comes from an adult-centred form of reasoning and thinking, and even though it is useful to construct a coherent idea about the emerging themes of a particular research process, when it comes to reconstructing children's experiences, categories risk becoming too static and fixed compared to the way children shared their experiences and thoughts about preschool. Moreover, the use of categories is always a form of reduction where valuable information can get 'lost in translation', even when researching with adult peers. For this reason, it is relevant to understand that the use of categories in this context is an artificial though necessary process in terms of making sense of their preschool experience. It is worth emphasising that, each category should not be treated in isolation, but as it relates to other categories. They must be understood as part of an ongoing experience that is fluid and in constant movement.

### **7.5 Children's Meaning of Preschool: Shared Experiences of Doing, Feeling and Participating with Others.**

As mentioned previously, the analysis I developed for understanding children's experience and meaning making of preschool, and the following conceptualisation of Quality, was a thematic analysis, organized around four major categories or themes, where some of these themes included subcategories that allowed me to describe in a more detailed manner, how that particular theme attempted to encapsulate the experience of children who participated in this study.

Figure 7.1, shows the way in which each of the categories that will be described next, are interconnected and mediating constantly as part of a specific experience towards preschool. Each of these categories can be derived from the observation and discussion with the participating children. Here, both the activities developed with the 4 selected children, as well as the observations of the whole classroom,

were included in the analysis, as they both reflect different aspects of the children's experience in the classroom. Similarly, I argue that each of the elements described by the children, interact with one another, and thus, they influence and affect the way in which children value and define their experience in ECE. This perception of the whole experience of Preschool is what children conceptualise as what could be called Quality by the official discourse (even though, children did not use this concept nor was it overtly imposed to them by me or by the activities we developed together).



**Figure 7.1** Children's Meaning Making of Preschool.

As can be seen in the figure, children involved in this study centred their experience around the relationships they develop with other key actors, whether it be other children in their classroom, or the adults involved in that setting (in this case, the practitioner, the teaching assistant and myself as a researcher and part of their setting for a specific period). Thus, one of the main aspects of their experience involved interacting with others, where children in this study constructed and understood their experience around these relationships. These

interactions were mediated and influenced by the activities they engaged with, the ways in which they communicated, the emotions they experienced in such interactions, and how they got involved with others and with the activities within the classroom. Thus, understood in terms of their interactions, these aspects working together, help make sense of the participating children's experience in preschool, and in their classroom. Such aspects can vary and change during the whole experience of attending preschool, and even during the course of one day.

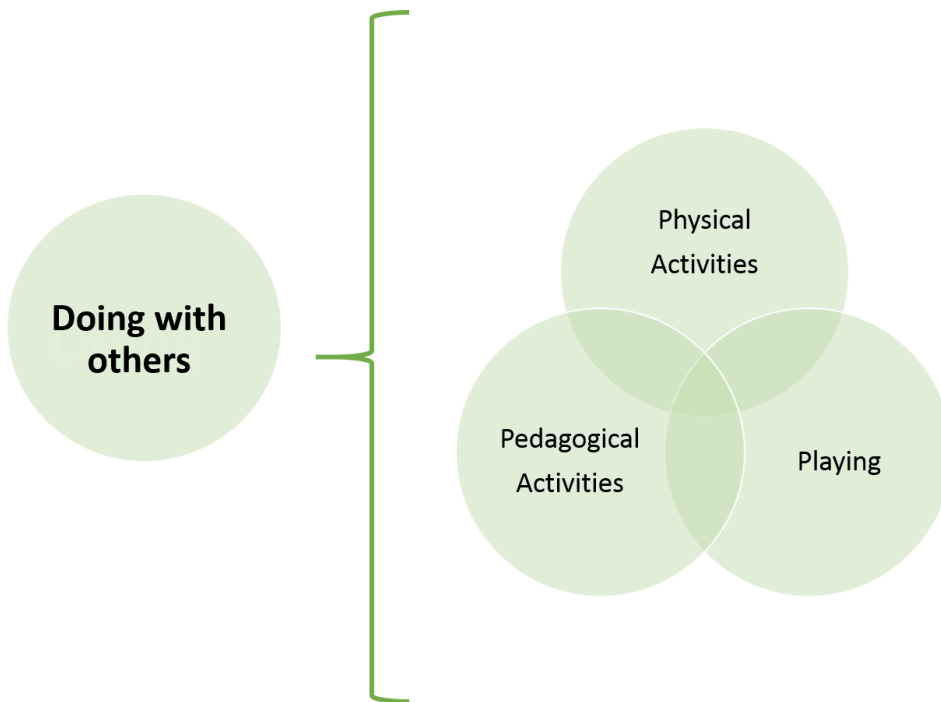
As it was discussed in Chapter 3, interactions within the preschool classroom have been the focus of research which argues that these provide the main 'process' features that deliver Quality ECE. Specifically, such features have been defined both in terms of the interactions established within the ECE setting between practitioners and children, as well as the activities designed and developed (Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006; Treviño et al., 2013; Sheridan, 2007). Some of the dimensions recognized in this field are described as follows: a) Challenging activities that engage students; b) Activities that involve dramatization and allow for emotional development in children; c) Various group activities (both large and small groups) that allow children to learn social skills and self-control; d) A balance between guided and free activities; e) Pedagogical interactions in which practitioners engage in scaffolding talk, that is, a guided dialogue that promotes reflection; f) A situation in which children are respected and challenged in a setting of warm, frequent and close relationships with adults and peers; and, e) Settings where children are allowed to make autonomous decisions during the day, choose between a series of activities and decide what materials to use, and establish conversations with their peers, thus exercising their creativity (Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006). Similarly, Lloyd & Potter (2014) describe a series of dimensions of Quality in their working paper prepared for the Rowntree Foundation in the UK, that focus mainly on interactions between practitioners and children, especially taking into account sensitive and responsive caregiving, reciprocal and contextualized interactions, and positive and secure attachments.

Lastly, standardized instruments that measure pedagogical interactions and activities within the classroom as process features of Quality, centre their assessment on areas such as (Janta, Da Belle & Stewart, 2016):

- Emotional tone, discipline and responsiveness of teachers
- Teacher-child interactions (in aspects such as instructional support, emotional support and classroom organization)
- Cultural sensitivity and Quality of instruction
- Pedagogical activities

In this sense, what children in this study describe as relevant about their experience in an ECE institution relates to what has been defined as relevant process features. However, such features have mostly been identified from a practitioner's point of view, focusing on what the adult does to promote Quality interactions and activities. Thus, even though some connections can be made between children's experience of ECE in this study and the literature, this does not necessarily mean that they share the same meaning in terms of what aspects of those interactions and activities they find most important. Moreover, the purpose of this study is precisely to highlight children's perspectives, without reducing their discourse to adult interpretations of what Quality means. Similarly, although it is relevant to analyse what children in this study mention as important within their ECE experience, within the broader Quality discourse, it is not my intention to categorize their views in terms of those structure and process features that are defined mostly through an adult-centred perspective. These does not preclude thinking about the participating children's responses in terms of structure and process, though care should be taken in how those categories are first interpreted.

### 7.5.1 Children's meaning making: We like doing things with others



**Figure 7.2** Doing with others as a category of meaning making in preschool.

As Figure 7.2 shows, this category was organized in terms of what children mentioned they liked to do the most in their preschool and classroom. It includes all types of activities. It is important to note that the activities mentioned were generally mixed, in that they were not purely physical, pedagogical or involving play.

#### a) **Physical Activities**

I defined physical activities as what children in this study mentioned as running and playing outside their classroom, in the playground. Children mentioned they enjoyed doing physical activities such as playing soccer in the court outside their classroom, and they also liked playing games that involved running and jumping. One of the children describes playing soccer with his friends:



### Excerpt 1

*Researcher: What kind of things do you enjoy doing at the preschool?*

*Carlos<sup>22</sup>: ...I like to play soccer. When I grow up I will play soccer. I would like to go to the soccer field with my classmates.*

Throughout the observations, noteworthy that when an activity involved using their bodies in a more active manner, children in this study appeared to enjoy it a lot more and actively participated. Moreover, the teacher and teaching assistant usually used physical activities as a way of engaging children when they were distracted or especially active. I described this in the field notes:

### Excerpt 2

*They are going to do balance and circuit exercises and then relaxation. The teacher and teaching assistant try to keep the children sitting down the whole time but they get up and talk to each other.*

*The teachers notice this and decide to take the children to the playground so they can 'get some energy out'. They are going to paint mandalas afterwards.*

As this excerpt shows, physical activities can be present both in play and games organized by the children, as well as designed specifically as a formal activity by the teachers. According to the literature describing children's views when evaluating their preschool, outdoor play is one of the aspects they tend to like the most, which is mostly described as playing outside or outdoor play (not necessarily referring to activities where physical movement is designed by the teachers) (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2007; Clark, 2005a; Einarsdottir, 2005; Kanyal & Cooper, 2010; Mooney & Blackburn, 2003). In this sense, as some of the studies show, this can be related to children having more freedom to choose the activity and how to engage in such activity, when they are engaging in physical actions or when they are in the playground instead of the classroom. This can also be linked to how children in this study experience their opportunities

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<sup>22</sup> For ethical reasons, all the names of the children who participated in the album making, and the ones who were recorded in the observations, as well as all the adults who participated, were changed.

to participate and make decisions within the preschool, which will be discussed in length when describing the category of 'Getting Involved' with others. Furthermore, this can also be related to one of the process features mentioned previously, that is, that children are allowed to make autonomous decisions regarding the activities they engage in. However, it is important to notice that definitions coming from a structure/process approach have been defined in terms of what the practitioner does to promote certain activities, and not how children construct meaning regarding such activities, and how they value them when analysing their experience in ECE.

### **b) Pedagogical Activities**

I defined this subcategory as pedagogical activities, taken to include activities that are designed by the practitioner or the teaching assistant to be developed in the classroom. These activities were mainly related to drawing, painting, 'writing' (which can either be copying letters, recognizing letters in a sheet, or imitating the writing movement with the pencil), and using materials such as blocks, books, costumes, and "house materials" (which are toys that imitate artefacts that are found in a house).

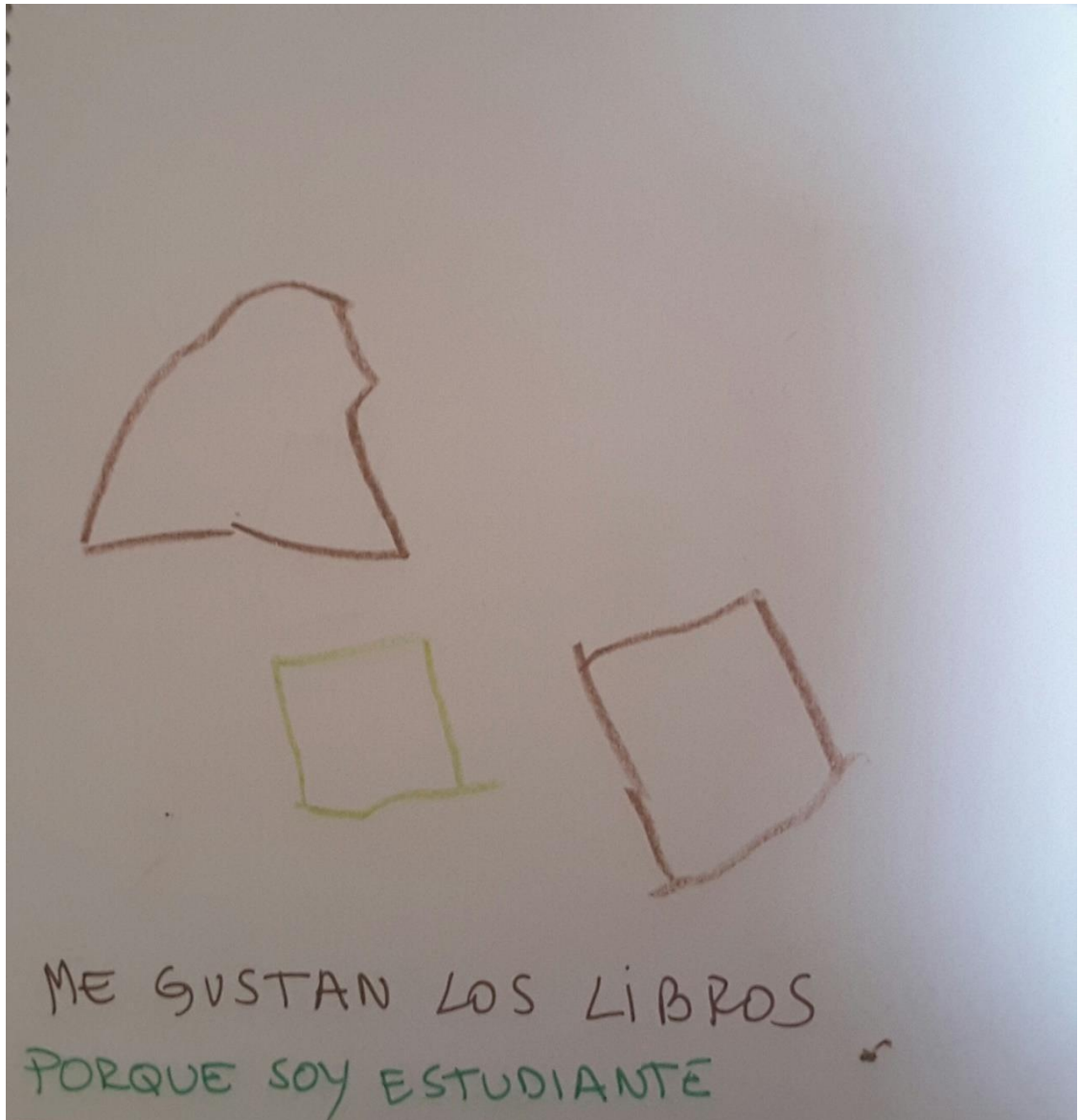
In general, children described these activities as being helpful to 'learn' things, as well as part of the reasons they attend preschool. This is particularly interesting as it shows how some conceptualisations regarding the experience of preschool are linked to the discourse of adults (e.g. that they attend preschool to 'learn'), and that they experience learning as something that they ought to do in the preschool instead of somewhere else.

#### Excerpt 3

*While drawing on the Album, I ask Carlos:*

*Researcher: What do you enjoy about coming to preschool?*

*Carlos: I like books because I am a student*



**Image 7.1** Carlos' Album of his preschool/classroom. *I like books because I am a student*, written annotations by N. Torres.

Carlos mentioned he liked books 'because I am a student' (annotated in the album by me). In this sense, it appears as though in this study, pedagogical activities such as learning numbers were viewed as part of the purpose of going to preschool, that is, to learn things before attending school. Additionally, children also mentioned they engaged in these activities not only because they 'needed' to learn, but also because they enjoyed them:

#### Excerpt 4

*Researcher: What things do you like about your preschool?*

*Carolina: I like to write the numbers and the letters.*

#### Excerpt 5

*Researcher: What do you like to do in your preschool?*

*Ana: I like to paint, draw, doodle. To draw sketches.*

Children in this study described these activities as being ‘entertaining’ and in the observations, it was also possible to see them enjoying using materials and engaging in activities that involved them drawing or writing, which is similar to what other children mentioned in studies focused on their views of preschool (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2007). In those studies, children liked to use different materials and activities where they could be creative (Clark, 2005a; Einarsdottir, 2005). This is similar to what was mentioned in this research, especially in terms of one of the activities called ‘corners’, which involved children choosing from 3 or 4 options to play freely (a corner where they could read and play dress up, a corner for constructing with blocks, a corner to play ‘house’, and a corner to draw and paint), which was also mentioned by children in other contexts (Bae, 2010). This can also be associated with process features described previously, in which children participate in challenging activities that promote not only cognitive development but also socio-emotional skills, focusing on the use of different materials and their involvement in diverse activities (Sheridan, 2007).

In this sense, and taking into account that every experience of childhood and preschool is different and constructed within specific social settings, it is interesting to see that children enjoy engaging in activities that not only involve physical actions, but also that they enjoy ‘learning’ (though they do not use the word). Additionally, children in this study did not always link these activities to a more formal aspect of preschool, but rather, they mentioned them as other forms of playing, and they even chose to play drawing/painting/writing. Thus, when analysing how children in this study described this type of activities, it is important to notice that they do not necessarily separate pedagogical activities from “free” play activities, unlike instruments that measure such process features, in which

different activities are analysed separately, and also, from the perspective of what the adult (in this case, the practitioner) does to promote certain activities (which are also defined from adult-centred point of view).

### c) **Playing**

Lastly, children enjoyed playing, engaging in games with other classmates, or playing by themselves. These activities were often not promoted nor specifically organized by adults, rather they were initiated by the children in their free time (whether inside or outside the classroom). As some of the children mention:

#### Excerpt 6

*Carolina: I like to play house and in the slip.*

#### Excerpt 7

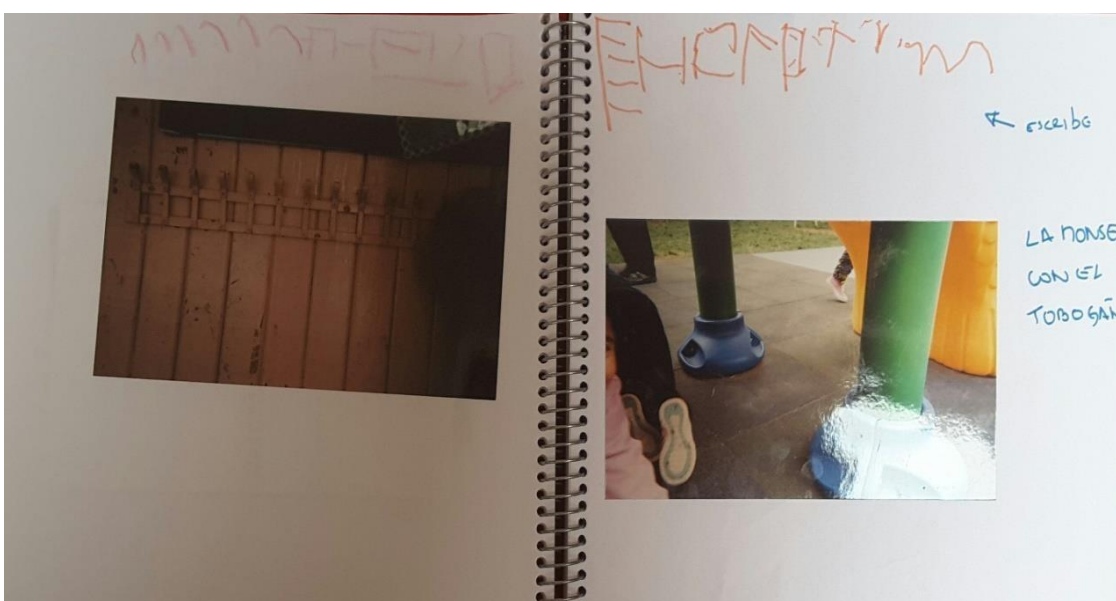
*Researcher: What things do you like to do?*

*Bernardo: I like to dance, play in the 'corners', in the house 'corner' and in the blocks 'corner'... I like to play soccer, and in the games.*

In terms of how the literature describes this type of activities, this subcategory can also be linked to process dimensions relating activities implemented within the preschool. Specifically, teachers are expected to promote not only guided but also free activities that allow children space for autonomous behaviour, as well as enable them to socialize and develop socio-emotional skills in different settings through small and large group activities (Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006). Nevertheless, once again, these process dimensions are defined in terms of how teachers promote such activities, and not in terms of how children describe and construct meaning regarding their ECE experience. Thus, even though it is important to recognize the relation between broader discourses of Quality in ECE and children's meaning making process, the analysis of such features needs to take into account that children's perspectives are generally somewhat subsumed to what adults think as appropriate for their development, rather than included as equally valid arguments (when compared to academic research or policy design).

In sum, within this category, it is important to recognize that all three types of activities are not isolated, and thus, they cannot be entirely separated from each other. In this sense, this categorization was constructed in order to simplify its description, but it has to be recognized as an artificial division made by an adult researcher. Sometimes, a physical activity could be organized by the practitioner or the teaching assistant as part of a pedagogical activity, and similarly, sometimes children chose to do exercise as a form of playing, or to draw and paint. For example, in excerpt 7, Bernardo did not distinguish between ‘playing’ soccer, and ‘playing’ with the blocks or drawing. To him, these are all activities he enjoyed, regardless of the nature of the activity, or if it was a designed activity or just playing freely in the playground.

This is an interesting finding, as the participating children often did not differentiate between ‘doing homework’ (as they call the pedagogical activities that are specifically designed by the adults) and ‘playing’. When making their albums, two of them asked me if they could do ‘homework’ in the album, and began drawing different things. Another child started ‘playing the teacher’ with me, and used the album to ‘write’ letters and numbers, and teaching me and asking me what they were. This can be seen in Image 7.2 below, which is taken from Valeria’s Album.



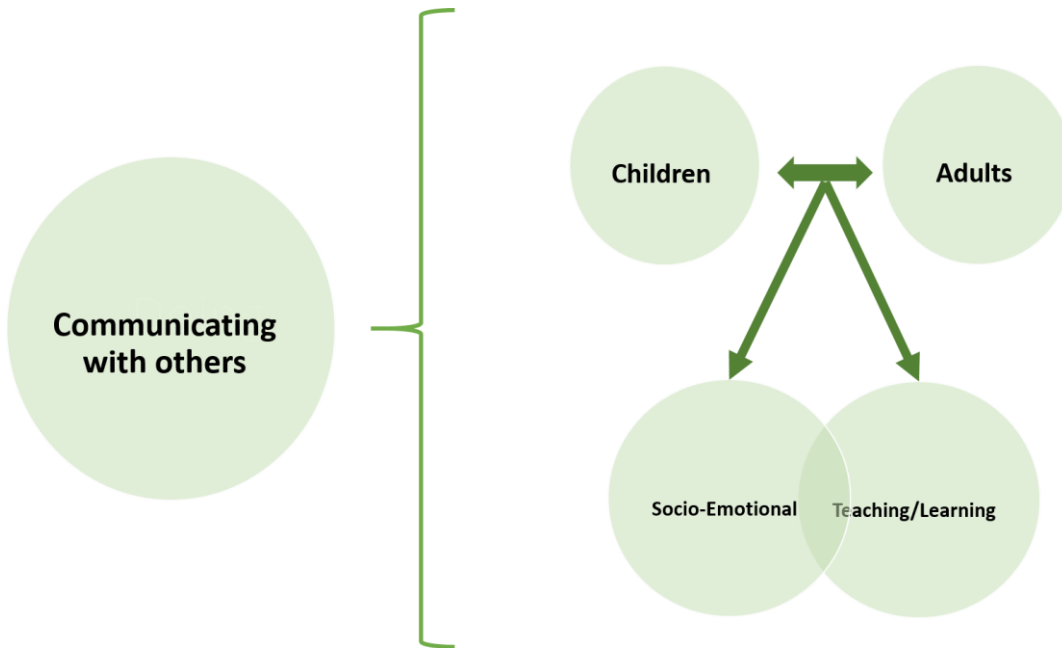
**Image 7.2** Valeria’s Album of her preschool/classroom. Annotations in blue by N. Torres.

In this image, Valeria 'writes letters' on the top of both pages (in orange), adding 'titles' to each photograph she decided to include in the Album. Similarly, she told me we were going to 'play' the teacher, and she was going to 'write' letters so that I could learn. In this sense, her idea of 'playing' involved doing a more 'pedagogical' activity, without her differentiating one type of activity from the other, as well as 'inverting' our roles where she became the teacher, and I the student. In this respect, it is possible to argue that the act of playing entails a process that promotes learning, irrespective of whether the nature of it (whether it is freely chosen by children or structured by adults with a pedagogic aim) (Wood & Hall, 2011; Wood & Hedges, 2016). Similarly, when using drawings and photographs to express themselves, children also constitute a learning and intellectual space, where they create, re-create and reconstruct their experiences, not only as a form of learning, but also as form of expressing their views and their understandings about their socio-cultural context (in this case, by imitating traditional relations established between practitioners and students).

The types of activities children in this study enjoyed are not necessarily associated with a specific action or objective, rather, the activities that made sense to them were related to other aspects such as the emotions they experienced, how involved they were in the development of that activity, and particularly, who they shared that experience with. In this sense, as most instruments used to evaluate Quality in ECE focus on pedagogical interactions and playing as a separate aspect of the experience, they are prone to assess such activities as if there was one 'correct' way of playing (Subramanian, 2015; Wood & Hall, 2011; Wood & Hedges, 2016). In which case, when evaluating Quality, playing is positioned almost solely as a pedagogical tool that can be used to foster Quality ECE, rationalizing and standardizing an action that in this study, is described by children as a much freer action, where games that imitate pedagogical actions are combined with other types of games and interactions, where socializing with other people seems to be at the centre, rather than a pedagogical objective. Similarly, process dimensions such as pedagogical activities and interactions also include playing as an important part of the ECE experience (Janta et al., 2016; Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006), but once again

defining it from an adult perspective, where the focus is put on the effectivity of that activity in promoting Quality learning outcomes, without necessarily incorporating children's meaning making of the same activity.

### 7.5.2 Children's Meaning Making: We Like to Communicate with Others



**Figure 7.3** Communicating with Others as a category of meaning making in preschool.

This category describes how children discussed communicating with others in the classroom, whether it was with adults responsible for them (practitioner, teaching assistant, and in some cases, myself), or with other children.

#### a) Communicating with Adults

##### i. Socio-Emotional Communication

One aspect of communication mentioned most frequently by children in other contexts when asked about their experience in preschool is related to interactions with other children and other adults (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2007; Clark, 2005a; Einarsdottir, 2005; Kanyal & Cooper, 2010; Mooney & Blackburn, 2003). Specifically, interactions with their caretakers and teachers were mentioned as



an important part of their experience. Similarly, process dimensions described by the literature also highlight the importance of establishing 'positive' interactions between children and adults, and between children themselves (Janta et al, 2016). In particular, children involved in this study had very specific ideas about how these interactions should be played out and how they prefer to communicate with adults involved in their preschool experience.

For children in this study, communicating with adults about social issues was connected to areas that were not associated with a pedagogical activity, ranging from conversations about everyday routines such as having tea with the family, attending a birthday party, among others, to conversations about their personal relationship with that adult (asking about details of their life, commenting on the clothes or accessories of an adult). Children in the classroom could be seen enjoying sharing aspects of their lives with adults, and engaging in conversations with them. Particularly, one of the girls who participated in the album making task, frequently asked me about my clothes and the nail polish I used:

#### Excerpt 8

*Carolina: I like your trousers aunt<sup>23</sup>*

*Researcher: You do? Thank you very much*

*Carolina: Why do you paint your nails?*

*Researcher: Because I like having different colours in them*

*Carolina: I like it too.*

The interactions with the practitioner and the teaching assistant were similar to this interaction between me and the girl. Additionally, children showed physical signs of affection when approaching the practitioners:

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<sup>23</sup> Aunt or Uncle is a way of naming an adult in a respectful but caring manner, used in Chile by children or younger people, to refer to an older person.

### Excerpt 9

*While the teacher is explaining the activity to the children, one of the girls approaches the teaching assistant and starts kissing her hand. The teaching assistant lets her and caresses her hair for a bit while they both listen to the instructions (Field notes of recorded observations).*

It was possible to see through the observations, that children in this study engage in social communications with adults very often, and they enjoy sharing aspects of their life with them, as well as having an affectionate relationship with them. This is particularly interesting as it relates to another category that will be explained later (*Feeling with Others*), in that children in this study experience preschool, and the adults that are involved in that setting, not just as a pedagogical experience in the instrumental, didactic sense, but also as an emotional and social one, which adds to the complexity of constructing meaning about preschool, and how they value such experience. Comparably, the process dimension of socio-emotional interactions between teachers and students also includes the importance of developing warm and supportive relationships with each other, and many of the instruments used to assess process Quality within ECE includes this as a main variable to observe (Janta et al., 2016). However, this dimension is almost always assessed from an adult's perspective, whether it be the practitioner evaluating his/her own practices, or an adult observing a classroom and interpreting different actions and behaviours in terms of adult-centred definitions of what constitutes a warm and supportive relationship. Thus, even though positive socio-emotional interactions are promoted, children's perspectives and definitions of what a positive socio-emotional interaction is, are not necessarily included when designing and implementing standardized Quality assessment instruments (Janta et al., 2016).

## ii. Teaching-Learning Communication

I describe this category as both teaching and learning, because, as most of the categories described here, these processes are understood by the children involved as being interrelated and sometimes reversible. This could be observed during some activities where the teacher was explaining something, and later on, the children would 'teach' her something they learnt (this could be more often observed when they were playing).

In general, this category is related to interactions where children engage with other adults to learn something, to show them what they have learnt, or how they are learning. Children in this study were especially keen to show their work to adults, both to seek help in a specific task, or to simply show their progress in an activity:

### Excerpt 10

*Researcher: How do we say yes then?*

*Carlos: This is no (he shows his thumb down), and this...this (he moves his hand trying to make thumbs down and thumbs up)*

### Excerpt 11

*Practitioner (Aunt María): Bicycle, like we are riding a bicycle. Very good.*

*Rafaela: Look! I did it! (other children also show the practitioner how they did it).*

*Aunt María: Very good!*

In these excerpts, it is possible to see that children in the study often looked to an adult to show them their 'progress' in the activity they were engaged with. This is interesting in that even though children will differ in how they interpret their experience in preschool (for instance in terms of not differentiating play from learning as it was described in the previous category), they still recognized the adult as an authority in terms of 'knowing' the assignment, showing them their work. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that children in this study were participating in an already defined setting, where adults have a specific role that is reaffirmed by how children interact with them.

Similarly, children also imitated adults that were teaching them, as a form of learning something new, or to show them they know about the subject. In addition, sometimes children imitated the way adults talked to them, to 'teach' something to another child or adult:

#### Excerpt 12

*Carlos: Look I made a vegetable for you (he gives the teaching assistant a plate with a plastic tomato on it)*

*Teaching Assistant (Aunt Rosa): What is this vegetable?*

*Carlos: The tomato*

*Aunt Rosa: The tomato. I'm going to sit here and have my tea. But I'm missing my bread, with what am I going to eat that tomato? (children bring different food to the teaching assistant who sits next to them in the "house corner")*

#### Excerpt 13

*Valeria Makes a drawing of a human being in her album, and forgets to draw the arms.*

*Valeria: (talking to me) She is missing her ar...? Arms! (imitating the practitioner's tone when she asks children questions)*



**Image 7.3** Valeria's Album of her preschool/classroom. Annotations in blue by N. Torres "she is missing her ar...arms!".

As the image shows (by the drawing and the instructions Valeria gives to me, written on the side of the page "she is missing her ar...arms!"), Valeria is once again 'playing teacher', while she explained to me what she was drawing in her Album. Similarly, in both excerpts, it was possible to notice that children experience pedagogical activities also as playing, and at the same time, they engage in interactions with adults that are both social (they are playing with me and the teaching assistant) and interactions about teaching and learning (they learn about vegetables).

In conclusion, communication between adults and children in this study is complex and diverse, in that on the one hand, there was a formal and established manner in which they interacted with each other, that is, the relationship between a teacher and a student (as defined by this particular setting and acknowledging the broader context of Chilean ECE), but at the same time, they also engaged in social and emotional relations, where the distance between children and adults

(as authority figures) was shortened. In relation to this, a study conducted in Chile, found that Chilean preschool practitioners scored higher in what was defined as emotional support than pedagogical support, but at the same time, their results in emotional support were associated with the dimensions of behaviour management and pedagogical format (which the authors associated with the fact that the sample was of public schools who attend to children coming from vulnerable settings)<sup>24</sup> (Treviño et al., 2013). What is interesting here is that, firstly, emotional and pedagogical dimensions are assessed separately as if they functioned independently from one another, an aspect that can be observed in several instruments that attempt to measure process features of Quality (Janta et al., 2016). Secondly, the apparent connection between pedagogical and emotional aspects in Chilean preschool teachers' practice is described as 'differing' from the theory behind the test, although it is not discussed as a perhaps different form of practice in the ECE classroom, rather it is described superficially. In the current study, it was observed that most of the interactions between adults and children shifted from an emotional aspect to a pedagogical one, and most of the time, both aspects were present at the same time, where the relation between adults and children also shifted from a more traditional and formal one, to a close and caring interaction. Moreover, children in this study described their relationship with their practitioner without distinguishing between pedagogical and emotional relationships. Thus, it is important to take into account that the way in which they constructed meaning about their ECE experience differed from the way in which process features are described (as described in the systematic reviews developed by Janta et al., 2016; and Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006), especially in terms of how interactions are categorized as separate aspects of a Quality setting.

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<sup>24</sup> Three domains were measured (pedagogical support, emotional support, and class organization) with a standardized test (CLASS) which is based on the work of Hamre and Pianta (2005), who suggest that research should focus on how the pedagogical practice influences children's outcomes, by observing the interactions between teachers and children.

## **b) Communicating with other Children**

### **i. Socio-Emotional Communication**

Social interactions between children were similar to the ones developed between adults and children in that they talk about their daily routines, about their families and friends, and they also show concern about classmates who are not feeling well or get sad after a fight or after being reprehended by the practitioner or the teaching assistant. Nonetheless, as mentioned previously, interactions between adults and children were generally intertwined with formal relations of authority in the classroom, and thus, interactions between children differ from those with adults in this aspect.

In studies of children's views on preschool and preschool quality, one of the most relevant aspects mentioned by children was related to social interactions with other classmates, both as a positive aspect (they enjoyed working and playing with others) and as a negative aspect (associated with conflicts between peers) (Einarsdottir, 2005; Mooney & Blackburn, 2003).

Children in this study were very social amongst each other and constantly engaged in conversations about other aspects of their lives, as well as playing in the playground or inside the classroom. They also helped each other do different things and defended friends from other children if they were involved in fights or conflicts.

#### Excerpt 14

*Santiago: Come on, I don't have anything... (He puts his hands in his face and elbows on the table).*

*(A girl sitting at his table tells him something regarding the classmate that took his puzzle pieces away, and gives him one of her pieces. He looks at it and then he throws it on the table, crosses his arms in the table and rests his head in his arms. When the other children at his table notice he is not participating anymore, they offer them puzzle pieces so he can play and start asking him things).*

*Paula: Are you sad? Are you crying?*

This was a common type of interaction between children, where they tried to make another classmate feel better after a conflict. In a similar way, they could go from having a conflict to playing together, without the involvement of an adult, showing different strategies and actions to solve their problems.

This is particularly interesting when analysing children's experience of preschool expressed in this study, with the way in which resolution of conflicts are measured by instruments that assess Quality process features. In this literature, interactions are measured in terms of how the practitioner resolves this type of conflict and how she/he manages behaviour, obscuring to some extent, the capacity of children to resolve their own conflicts in a more active manner (Pianta et al., 2008; Janta et al., 2016).

#### ii. Teaching-Learning Communication

This category is of interest, because it shows children were also interested in learning with their classmates, as well as teaching them. They usually engaged in conversations with other children while doing the activity designed by the teacher. These conversations mostly involved repeating information delivered by an adult, correcting classmates, giving advice as to how to complete the homework, and even discussing the best way to complete a task.

In this excerpt, children are learning how to make homemade bread. They are very excited about this activity and remain very attentive to what the teacher says and does.

#### Excerpt 15

*Carla: Hey! Smell the dough! (she tells the other children)*

*Several children comment on how the dough is (texture, smell, colour)*

*Nicolás: I'm going to make a small bread*

*They squish the dough on the table. Some hit it hard or push it against the table, others roll it or squish it in their hands. Everyone is talking amongst each other and giving each other advice on how to make the bread.*

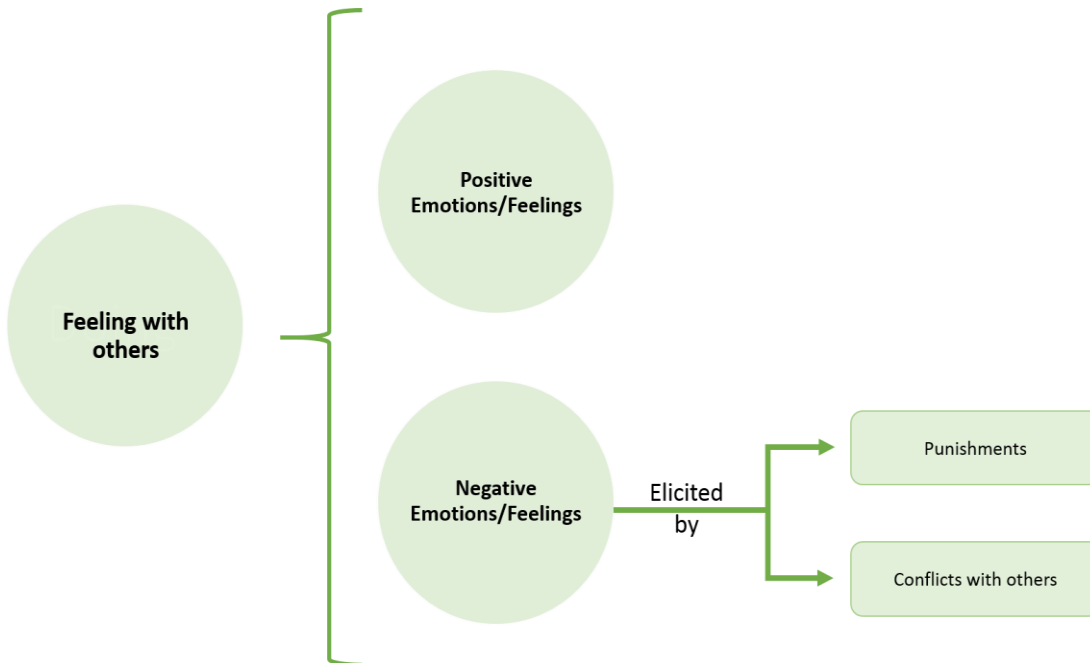


Children in this study enjoyed working together to complete a task, even if the task was designed to be completed individually, and they also liked to comment about what they were doing, and ask their classmates for help. These interactions are interesting in that they also show that the relations developed between adults and children, sometimes were mimicked between children, as they engaged in 'teaching' interactions the same way adults behaved with them (sometimes even using the same language). This can be related to the complexity of the interactions developed in this particular setting, where at the same time, constraints about the environment of the preschool (where most, if not all, of the functioning of the institution is defined and executed by adults) affected how children interpreted their experience. In this sense, the meaning children in this study gave to their experience in preschool included both unique standpoints coming from their social position and way of thinking, but was also influenced by the context in which they were embedded, sometimes reproducing unequal relations (adult-children) between them.

In sum, children participating in this study communicated with other children and with adults in diverse and complex ways, and these forms of interactions influenced and mediated in how they experienced preschool. Moreover, these interactions were also influenced by the emotions and feelings children experienced within the preschool setting, adding complexity to how children construct meaning about their experience, and how they value the activities and interactions in which they are embedded.

### 7.5.3 Children's Meaning Making: We Experience Emotions and Feelings with Others.

This category, 'Feeling with Others', was organized around the emotions and feelings children mentioned having when in preschool, as well as emotions and feelings they showed during the observations.



**Figure 7.4** Emotions/Feelings as a category of meaning making in preschool.

As depicted in Figure 7.4, the emotions and feelings observed and/or expressed by children in this study could be organized as positive and negative, with negative emotions elicited by different situations related to interactions with adults and other children.

#### a) **Positive Emotions/Feelings**

In general, positive emotions were associated with feeling happy and enjoying an activity, the experience of play, and positive experiences of sharing with other classmates or with an adult. The emotions shown and described by the children were mainly in relation to another person, whether it be a child or an adult. Similarly, they also mentioned they felt 'happy' when doing activities such as drawing, and painting. In addition, some of the children who participated in the

album making, mentioned they felt happy learning about new things, and playing with their classmates.

#### Excerpt 16

*Carolina: I like to tell stories to my friends. I like being with the teacher because she is nice and cares about me. The teacher teaches things, the numbers, the letters. We also do English homework.*

In this case, Carolina also mentioned she liked being with the teacher because she was 'nice' and cared about her. All the children who participated in the album making, mentioned that the teacher cared about them and was loving. This was also observed in the classroom, as children constantly sought the teacher's attention and physical affection. For children participating in studies in other contexts, caring relationships were listed also as an important aspect of their experience in preschool (Armstrong & Sugawara, 1989; Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2007), where they mentioned enjoying spending time with their classmates and with their caretakers. This is also included as important process features for Quality ECE, as warm and close relationships between practitioners and adults are promoted (Pianta et al., 2008; Janta et al., 2016). However, it is important to notice that this dimension is often measured in terms of what the practitioner does to promote such interactions, and not in terms of a bidirectional relationship where children actively engage in interactions that can generate negative or positive emotions, and thus, contribute to the construction of meaningful relationships between children and adults. In this sense, negative and positive emotions are defined in terms of practitioners' actions and children's reactions to those actions, rather than a reciprocal relationship where children have agency in how their experience of ECE is constructed.

#### **b) Negative Emotions/Feelings**

Negative emotions were also clearly exhibited by children during the observations, as well as mentioned by some of the children who participated in the album making. Just as with positive emotions and feelings, negative emotions are associated with interactions with others. Two specific situations where most

frequently mentioned by participants and observed in relation to their interaction: punishments and conflicts.

#### i. Punishments

Perhaps unsurprisingly, punishments were mentioned by children as a negative experience that elicited negative emotions and feelings. Particularly in the observations, children who were reprimanded by an adult, expressed negative emotions such as anger or sadness, especially when the punishment was associated with not working, or being separated from the group. This was usually followed by feelings of discomfort or boredom.

##### Excerpt 17

*Aunt Rosa: Look aunt María, there's a boy who's not going to be able to work, look, look at what he did. That's not good...*

*(the teaching assistant takes the documents to put brackets on them. Bernardo gets sad, crosses his arms and lies on the table with his face on the arms).*

*Aunt Rosa: Bernardo, hey look Bernardo (the assistant comes with the documents and the practitioner also comes closer. Bernardo lifts his head and sees that the assistant has his homework and she is giving it back to him. He smiles and starts working again)*

The punishments observed in the classroom involved disrupting the behaviour the child was having, or separating the child from his/her classmates to work alone. Additionally, it was especially interesting to notice that most of the punishment involved not allowing the child to continue working on the prescribed activity, as a form of penalization for their 'disruptive' behaviour. Moreover, children in the study were reprimanded when they attempted to complete an activity in a different manner than how it was instructed. This is an interesting aspect, as it reflects the complexities within the setting in which children are immersed, specifically in terms of the external restrictions children experience when approaching a learning activity. In this sense, even though children show interest in completing the prescribed activities, they are penalized if they engage with them in a way that is valued as 'negative' or 'disruptive' by the adults in the

setting, restricting the manner in which children involve themselves in their preschool experience.

ii. Conflicts with other children

Another situation that elicited negative emotions and feelings observed in the recordings was when children engaged in some kind of conflict with another classmate. These conflicts could be related to a pedagogical activity (e.g. not sharing materials, fighting about how to do the task, among others), a conflict about sharing a toy when playing, a fight started in the playground, among others. For instance, there was one situation where children engaged in discussions about how to share and use pieces of a puzzle they were working on together:

Excerpt 18

*Santiago: You don't hit with that! (he raises his voice and bangs the table with his fists)*

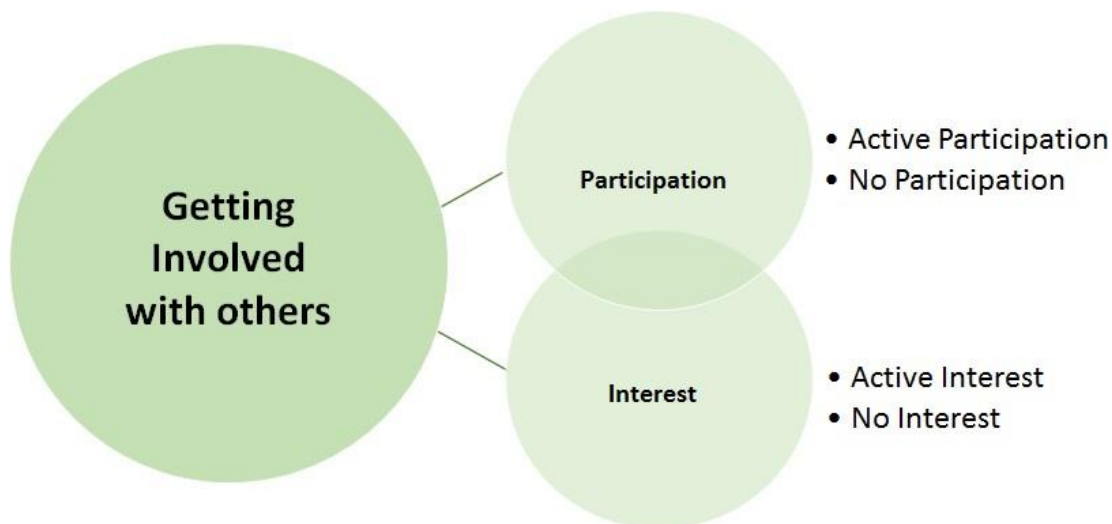
*The boy is mad and tells his classmate something with a serious tone. He talks about the puzzle pieces and his other classmate who's not sharing. He touches his head and makes gestures.*

Emotions, whether they be positive or negative, mediated how children in this study participated in activities, and how they interacted with others. This is significant given the fact that studies tend to emphasise the importance of relationships and creative activities, though they do not discuss their link with emotions (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2007; Mooney & Blackburn, 2003). These studies do not mention how these relationships and activities are influenced by the emotions children experience, as well as how the emotions present in the classroom affect the way an activity or an interaction is developed. In such research, there is a tendency to almost universalize the importance of interacting with others as if this were a basic and incontestable feature of good preschool. This, risks underplaying the complexity of such interactions which tend to be emotionally charged, and it underestimates the importance of understanding how children in different settings relate to other classmates and adults. In this case, it is important to acknowledge that children in this study engage in significant

relations with other children and with adults, and that the emotions they experience influence the way in which they interact with others, the activities that they enjoy or value, and how they get involved in their experience in preschool.

#### **7.5.4 Children's Meaning Making: We like to get involved**

This last category was organized in terms of the degree of involvement children showed towards the different activities developed in the preschool, and the interactions with other children and with adults. This was observed mainly during the observations in the classroom, as well as in the playground. As Figure 7.5 shows, involvement of children includes their active participation in the classroom activities, as well as showing interest in a specific aspect of their experience in preschool. Similarly, the lack of involvement of children includes losing interest in the classroom activities (sometimes children could be participating but showing boredom or weariness, as well as getting distracted), and/or excluding themselves from the activity by not participating.



**Figure 7.5** Degree of Involvement as a category of meaning making in preschool.

Involvement relates to how children engaged in interactions or in activities inside the classroom, and how active their engagement was. Several studies focused on analysing children's perspectives on their preschool mention the importance that participation and involvement has on how children perceive their experience in preschool. Armstrong & Sugawara (1989) conclude that how children experience their environment, influences how they will get involved in that environment. Similarly, Bae (2010) also describes participation as a relevant aspect of children's experiences in preschool, and distinguishes between opportunities to participate individually, versus experiencing cooperative forms of participation. In this sense, children in this study mentioned and showed that participation and involvement in the different processes happening in the preschool was relevant to them, to the point where, if they perceived an activity or an interaction negatively, or if they felt negative emotions related to an activity or to another person, the way in which they engaged in their experience of preschool changed rapidly. Moreover, their degree of participation and interest was interconnected, and influenced each other constantly.

#### **a) Involvement**

This category refers as to when children appeared involved in an activity or an interaction in the classroom. This was related to positive feelings and emotions that they explicitly showed.

##### **i. Participating**

This subcategory refers to involvement of children in terms of participating in the activities or in the interactions promoted by adults or other children. Participation varied in terms of who initiated the space for participation. Most of the time, participation in activities was promoted by the practitioner when asking questions about the activity, or when asking children to actively participate in the activity. The form of participation was mostly individual.

### Excerpt 19

*Aunt María: Look, we are going to close... we don't pull our sleeves down because we are going to knead, and to knead, we need to have our sleeves up. Ok, what are we going to do today?*

*Children: (at the same time) homemade bread!*

*Aunt María: Homemade bread. Hey. And who used to make homemade bread?*

*Claudio: Me!*

*Aunt María: Yes, I know all of you. But what culture are we getting to know?*

*Children: The Mapuche!*

*Aunt María: Exactly. Our recipe is of, we are going to write (she writes in the blackboard), look, Home-maaade...bread.*

*Children repeat "homemade bread"*

*Aunt María: Let's see, assistant! (she calls the teaching assistant with a funny voice) what do we need for our recipe?*

*Bernardo: An assistant!*

*Aunt María: Yes, there's my assistant. Assistant Rosa! (with a funny voice). What else do we need for our recipe? Look at our yummy homemade bread (She shows a picture). This is how it's going to be! yum yum yum (she puts the picture in the blackboard). What do we need for our homemade bread? We need (she looks inside the bag she has with the ingredients)*

*Children: Bread... (some of them say bread, but then they look at what the teacher takes from the bag) Flour!*

In this excerpt, children show excitement about the activity, and answer the questions the teacher employed to engage them in the activity. This is a usual form of participation in which children are actively involved. Additionally, this activity involved children making their own bread, and in this sense, they experienced more freedom in terms of how they could carry out the activity, they seemed to appreciate. Similarly, children also participated directly in the activity by completing a small task proposed by the teacher. In this case, children were included in the activity designed by the teacher, and they enjoyed being part of it.



Another form of participation was when children asked questions or commented on a subject related to the activity being developed by the practitioner or teaching assistant.

#### Excerpt 20

*Aunt María: Look, what we are going to do has... I'm going to give you some clues. First, we are going to use music...first, what we are going to do here in the blackboard, I that we are going to draw a boy...look.*

*Daniel: what child?*

*Aunt María: Any child. A very skinny child, because your aunt doesn't know how to draw big children, she only knows how to draw stick children...oh! This boy is very happy, and he is?*

*Carolina: Cheerful! (she mispronounces)*

*Aunt María: He is happy, he is cheerful, and he is...like this (the teacher moves her arms pointing up)*

*Aunt Rosa: he is moving his body*

*Aunt María: He is moving...and he is listening to a special music. Another thing he does, when...what you must find out because I can't tell you, you have to find out yourselves...*

*Raquel: Ok*

*Aunt María: the first thing we do...after...wow! Is to put a fun music*

*Raquel: yes!*

*Aunt María: Look, we are going to draw a girl now. This is step 1 (points to the boy), and now...*

*Carolina: comes step 2...*

*Aunt María: Comes step 2. Now we are going to draw a girl.*

*Carolina: And the girl is step 2*

When children were excited about an activity, or they seemed interested in what was going to happen, they asked more questions and commented more on the activity than when they did not seem that interested. Sometimes, the comments included imitating the teacher by speaking in a different tone, and explaining other classmates about the activity.

## j. Interest

Interest is described as children explicitly showing excitement about a particular activity. The interest could be shown by a smiling face, words of excitement or shouting, clapping their hands, or even jumping around. Interest was also mentioned by children when explaining what they liked to do in the preschool, or when explaining the pictures they took and the drawings they made.

### Excerpt 21

*Aunt María: Ok, on this side, we are going to put the construction materials (some of the children complete the sentence along with her) and we are going to make a very big 'corner' because I know you guys like it a lot.*

*Bernardo: I like a lot the...I really like that 'corner'*

*Aunt María: I know!*

*Children: Me too! I like it!*

*Aunt María: I know you love it!*

*Children: Eeeeh! (expression of joy)*

In this excerpt, children explicitly show their excitement about an activity they really like to do. In this sense, they had an understanding about the type of activities they could do in the classroom, and also showed preferences regarding the ones they liked the most. Sometimes, the difference in terms of involvement could be clearly seen before they started playing in the corners, and afterwards. In this sense, children showed interest and excitement towards activities that were created and designed by adults, most of them with a pedagogical orientation. Nonetheless, the degree of involvement was influenced by their daily experiences and interactions with others, as well as how the emotions and feelings they experienced.

**b) No involvement (feeling excluded)**

No involvement can be described as children not engaging in the activities or interactions with other people in the classroom. Most of the situations that elicited no involvement from the children were related to a form of exclusion (being punished or reprimanded, fighting with a classmate, considering the activity boring or not challenging enough, among others). Here, children could choose not to get involved in an activity, but the adults in charge made them participate anyway, which they did reluctantly or getting constantly distracted. In this sense, given that children are inserted in a setting that is mainly defined by adults, they did not have the liberty to choose which type of activity they wanted to do or when to do it. In response, they showed lack of interest or started doing something else, for which they were reprimanded or punished.

i. Not participating

Not participating ranged from those children who did not participate in an activity from the outset (because they felt it was a boring activity, or because they had a previous conflict with another child or with an adult and were not willing to participate), to those who ceased participating during the activity (because a conflict had arisen with an adult or another child, or because they felt like they did not know how to do the activity).

Excerpt 22

*Ana comes to the teacher with her homework and gives it to her.*

*Aunt María: (speaking in a low volume) you need to finish your homework; it does not say Ana there. Look, it says Ana there, but it does not say Ana there (pointing at the homework), can you do it? (Ana says no with her head). Yes, you can, because you are very big girl.*

*Ana: No, I'm not big, I'm very small.*

For some of the children who participated in this study, the idea of not being able to perform an activity was often followed by not participating in it. Most of the time they did not disrupt the activity, rather, they kept quiet in their seats but did not engage in the task until the teacher approached them to help them. Sometimes, this form of not involvement was accepted by the adults, and sometimes they were asked to participate anyway. This was an interesting finding, as it showed that children chose not to participate in activities where they felt insecure in terms of their performance, even if the activity was 'mandatory'.

## ii. Losing Interest

Children could also not get involved in the activity or an interaction, because they lost interest in the situation. This could happen due to a conflict, or simply because they got bored and started doing something else instead. Losing interest did not necessarily mean they did not engage in another activity or another interaction, but rather that they lost interest to that situation in particular.

### Excerpt 23

*Some of the children are playing with the materials in the shelves.*

*Aunt María: No, we are not taking these things because we are going to explain what we are going to do, ok?*

*Aunt María: We are leaving these makeups... why are you on the mats if your classmates are sitting on the floor? Mandy and María's makeup in their backpacks, or do we leave them up here? Ok, so we don't forget later. Here we have, Mandy's bag, Carlos's car, Laura's ball, and Martina's bag.*

*The teaching assistant approaches Carlos to tell him to leave the materials and sits to listen to the activity.*

*Aunt María: listen, you are all going to sit very close to the mats. Friend, did you hear me? Sit over there because I'm going to tell you what we are going to do. Carlos is not going to be able to listen to what we are doing (he approaches him and talks in a low volume).*

*Aunt María: Bernardo, Bernardo won't be able to choose what we are doing (Bernardo rolls on the floor). Bernardo, do you want to hear to what I'm going to tell you?*

*One of the children 'tells on' Carlos, who is back at the shelves playing with the materials. The assistant goes and gets him. She sits next to him.*

In this case, several children in this study were very distracted before the activity started, and it was difficult for them to listen to the teacher. The distractions were related to playing with other materials, or with playing on the floor. These types of distractions were common when going from one activity to another, and they were also mostly related to a period where they had to sit still and wait for instructions. In relation to this, participation and involvement in their preschool experience is a relevant aspect mentioned by children in other contexts (Bae, 2010; Einarsdottir, 2005; Kanyal & Cooper, 2010). However, participation and involvement in this study seemed to be relegated to answering and asking questions, and participating directly in an activity when the teacher promoted it explicitly. Similarly, even though children showed lack of interest or distraction from a specific activity or interaction, they were not able to choose what they wanted to do, which sometimes resulted in disruptive behaviour or conflict amongst peers. This can be related once again with the fact that even though children can have a specific way of constructing meaning about their experience in preschool, they are also constrained by the environment which has been defined by others (adults), and the fact that their freedom to choose how they experience preschool was highly limited. Similarly, this can also be associated with definitions of pedagogical interactions within the structure and process features approach to Quality, where it is highlighted that activities should promote autonomy in children, and the possibility for them to choose between a range of activities and actively engage in challenging settings, rather than passively responding to specific tasks (Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006; Janta et al., 2016). Moreover, Lang & Wong (2015) highlight that learning “takes place most effectively through social interactions when students and children are engaged in the community and in their varied sociocultural settings” (p.193). In this sense, these authors argue that learning has a multifaceted and situated nature that is directly related with how children actively engage with the world around them.

## 7.6 Summary of Chapter

When understanding how children make meaning of their experience, and how this meaning is related to how Quality is conceptualised by the official discourse as well as the international literature, it is necessary to take into account that even when attempting to hear children's voices, the setting in which they are inserted influences how they construct their own perspective, and how they interpret their experience. In a similar way, my own views and perspectives regarding the concept of Quality and children's participation in their ECE settings restrict the possibilities to accurately portrait children's meaning making of their ECE experience without including an adult-centred view of their conceptualizations. Thus, it is important to recognize the complexity of interpreting children's experience, and how their perspective is influenced by broader discourses regarding ECE, as well as how they themselves are viewed by other actors within the preschool setting.

The degree of involvement children in this study have in their preschool context influences how they perceive the rest of their experience, and how they make sense of that experience as a 'positive' or 'negative' one. The categories described here are an attempt at reflecting as respectfully as possible, how children construct meaning in relation to their experiences of preschool, and how they perceive and conceptualise these experiences as good or bad.

Overall, it appears as though children focus their meaning making process in the interactions they have with others, and how those interactions affect the way in which they interpret their experiences. Thus, the ECE setting is characterized by children in this study in terms of the relationships they develop with others, and how those relationships are put into practice in different situations, shaping the way they get involved in activities, and how they interpret their role within the preschool.

When analysing children's meaning making of their ECE experience, what they considered relevant can also be found in what is described as process features of Quality ECE, specifically, interactions (pedagogical and socioemotional) and activities (Rolla & Rivadeneira, 2006; Lera-Rodríguez, 2007; UNICEF, 2000). However, even though there is a relation between what is considered relevant within the Quality ECE discourse, and what children in this study conceptualize about their ECE experience, this does not mean that both conceptualizations are similar in terms of who's views are included in their definition. In this sense, while interactions and activities are described by the participant children from an active position in terms of how they contribute to the construction of their ECE experience, these same dimensions are defined by the Quality discourse, specifically as process features, from an adult's perspective, not only in terms of who defines the concepts and conducts standardized measures, but also in terms of who is held responsible for promoting their implementation within the ECE setting. Thus, positive interactions and challenging activities are measured by looking at the practitioners' practices and their ability to promote them, without necessarily including how children are constructing meaning of those interactions and activities, and how they also contribute to their promotion as active participants of their ECE experience.

In addition, as has been highlighted in this Chapter, children in this study construct meaning of their ECE experience in terms of the relationships they build with others, so it is possible to infer that their experience varies greatly depending on the interactions they engage in, the activities in which they participate, the emotions they feel, and the involvement they have in their setting. In contrast, as process features such as interactions and activities are measured through standardized instruments that focus on the practitioners' actions, children's perspectives are obscured or at most, reinterpreted by an adult's point of view. Thus, what children in this study describe as relevant when making meaning of their experience in terms of the importance of their own emotions and participation in their ECE context is not reflected necessarily when measuring process features.

Lastly, children in this study interpret their experience in a fluid manner, where each of the categories described here influence each other as well as the way in which they make meaning of their ECE experience. Thus, it is also especially relevant to understand and analyse if and how this perspective is reflected in the official discourse's conceptualization of Quality in ECE. I will expand on this issue in Chapter 8.



## **Chapter 8. 'Official Discourse' of Quality and Children's Experience of Preschool: Practitioners at the Centre of the Tension.**

### **8.1 Introduction**

Having described the main findings of both the 'official discourse' (as characterized by the official documents analysed and the stakeholders interviewed) regarding conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile, as well as children's meaning making process in relation to their experience of preschool, it is possible now to engage in reflections relating to the tensions and commonalities present in both perspectives. This Chapter will focus on the common issues raised during the analysis, between the 'official discourse' and children's experiences of preschool, and how such issues can be analysed from a postcolonial and feminist perspective, highlighting the complexities present in the ECE context in relation to the concept of Quality. Thus, this Chapter will attempt to answer the last complementary question of this study, that is:

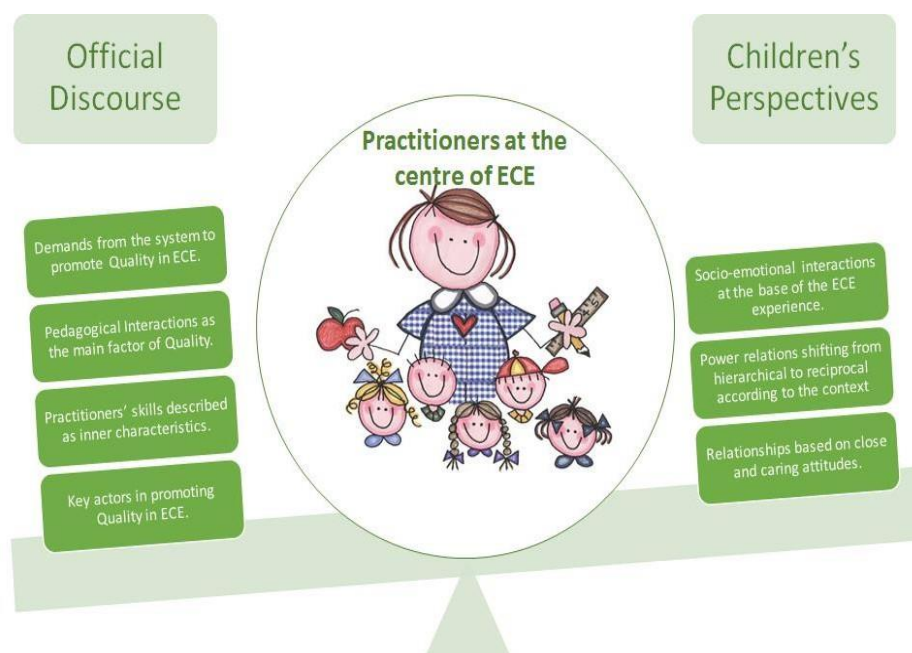
- 3) What are the commonalities, differences and tensions present between the conceptualisations of Quality constructed by stakeholders, and how children construct meaning in relation to their ECE experience?

Through the critical analysis of the findings described previously, I will aim at discussing the main tensions and commonalities found in both perspectives, and how they relate (or not) to how the concept Quality is defined and put into practice in the context of an ECE institution in Chile.

## 8.2 The Role of Practitioners in Relation to Quality in ECE: Between External Demands and Internal Contradictions.

Practitioners were situated by the 'official discourse' as critical actors in the drive to achieve Quality in ECE. Practitioners also featured prominently in the children's construction of their preschool experiences in this study. It is clear then, that the role of practitioners was perceived and positioned at the centre of ECE by all participants in this research. Nonetheless, the way in which their role was described and situated by the actors involved in this study, differed greatly.

The following diagram summarises how practitioners were conceptualised both by the 'official discourse' and children's perspectives:



**Figure 8.1** Practitioners at the centre of ECE in Chile.

As the diagram shows, conceptualisations of Quality in ECE by the 'official discourse' and children's perspectives of ECE appear to be not only in relation to one another but also in tension, especially in terms of how practitioners are perceived and positioned in the ECE experience. Regarding the 'official discourse', practitioners were described as 'key' in terms of achieving and promoting what is defined as Quality in ECE (including all the tensions and

ambiguities that the definition involves). However, even though their practice was described as pivotal, such practice was still defined by others ('experts'), leaving practitioners' perspectives and experience in the field at the margins of these definitions. In this sense, although they were perceived as being at the centre of Quality in ECE, this did not necessarily mean that they have an active role in defining what Quality is, how (or if) it should be defined and promoted, and furthermore, how their role influences the way the ECE experience is constructed by children.

From a postcolonial perspective, it is possible here to reflect on how practitioners might be positioned in the same way as the 'Other' is positioned by the neo-colonial discourse of 'First World' countries. These discourses, on the one hand, highlight certain features of those cultures present in 'Third World' countries in a romantic and idealized manner, while on the other hand, they diminish their relevance and subjugate local knowledge to 'universal' and 'homogeneous' forms (Andreotti, 2011; Moore-Gilbert, 1997). In a similar way, as this study has shown, the ECE practitioner is mostly described as a sort of 'heroic' professional who can achieve Quality, despite working in settings that lack the key features described as necessary by the same 'official discourse'. Additionally, when it comes to the set of skills a practitioner ought to have, the 'official discourse' represented in this study described these skills in an almost ethereal manner, where personal characteristics appear to be more important than the training received by practitioners, or the curricular design of the educational institutions in charge of training them. In relation to this issue, and just as Casassus argues, the very notion of that 'something else' invoked by humanistic approaches to defining Quality obscures the complexity and 'impure' nature of the concept (Casassus, 2003). Similarly, it obscures the ambiguity with which practitioners' skills are described, allowing for more pressure and demands to be made of them, without specifying the origin or organising rationale behind such demands, and thus, relying heavily on practitioners to achieve goals that are not clearly defined by the 'official discourse' in the first place.

Set alongside how Quality is conceptualised, it seems that the practitioners' role in ECE and in achieving Quality in ECE (as defined by the 'official discourse' in this study) was defined just as ambiguously as the concept itself. Here there was consensus in the idea that practitioners are key to achieving Quality. However, tensions appeared in terms of the 'ethereal' nature of the skills they ought to bring to the practice, and the rigidity of the international and 'universal' standards they are pressured to achieve. As mentioned previously, these tensions can be observed in how practitioners' skills are described as somewhat 'innate', while external standardized measures that focus on process features related to practitioners are used to assess their actions both in terms of policy evaluation as well as within research.

Additionally, local knowledge coming from practitioners' experiences in ECE was considered mostly in relation to broader and international guidelines to define Quality, rather than in terms of co-constructing local meanings regarding Quality in ECE in Chile. This serves to obscure the particularities of the socio-historical context of the country, and how that context can influence the way practitioners develop their practice in ECE in Chile.

Approached from a Latin American postcolonial perspective, the conceptualisation of Quality by the 'official discourse' analysed in this study can be understood in terms of how the rationalistic and scientific discourse of knowledge imposed through colonization processes and established as a hegemonic form of knowledge, is internalized by the colonized (in this case, by the Chilean context) as 'truths'. In this sense, as Castro-Gómez (2000) describes, the relationship between colonization and the development of the project of modernity, understood as the attempt to submit life to the control of the people under the guidance of scientific knowledge, seems highly relevant. In this context, the State could be viewed as an agent that sets society's so-called interests, establishing collective and homogenous goals that are said to be valid for everyone. It serves its function by developing and implementing concepts and rational criteria designed to channel citizen's desires and interests to goals that it outlines, and in that way, serves the global imperatives of post-colonial power.

Nonetheless, the contradictory position in which countries such as Chile are positioned, allows for the development of a 'double consciousness' as described in Chapter 4, where the rational and scientific discourse is internalized and recognized as the 'only' way to achieve 'development', while at the same time, that same discourse excludes and marginalizes these countries, reproducing the colonial difference between those who are in power, and those who are ruled by them. Thus, the discourse of Quality can be paralleled to how the discourse of knowledge is established, and how the imposition of international standards allows for the reproduction of inequalities in the system. In this sense, Quality goals are defined and designed by what is thought of as 'universal' truths, while at the same time, those same goals are rendered impossible to achieve within the context of Chile. Specifically, Quality goals can be interpreted as part of the criteria established by 'First World' countries to become 'developed', being designed from a Eurocentric and neoliberal perspective, excluding other countries from the possibility of achieving such goals. Thus, 'universal' Quality goals become achievable only for those who are already described as 'developed' countries, leaving nations such as Chile in a position of ambiguity and exclusion (Mignolo, 2000). Here, Quality goals are described as 'universal' when in fact, they are constructed under the premise that some will become 'developed' whilst others will not. In turn, nations are required to achieve such goals while at the same time, they are excluded from acquiring key 'knowledge' and opportunities needed to achieve them.

The act of positioning practitioners at the centre of its achievement can also be understood as a colonial device. These contradictions present in the construction of the role of practitioners by the 'official discourse' must be understood within the history of the teaching profession in Chile, especially since the establishment of neoliberal policies during the dictatorship which dismantled teaching unions and stripped teachers of their autonomy. As a consequence, decisions in terms of the design and implementation of educational policies at every level have been controlled by politicians and experts, where responsibilities and results have been demanded from teachers and practitioners, rather than including them as key actors in the construction of the educational system. Thus, even though practitioners are situated at the centre of the educational system, they are equally

excluded in the construction of the Quality discourse, remaining as part of the system, but not quite.

In relation to ECE, practitioners are given great responsibilities in terms of promoting and achieving Quality, but not sufficient status to influence and transform educational policies, as well as how ECE is viewed and valued. This can also be observed at a broader level when analysing process features of Quality relating practitioners' interactions and abilities, where even though they are positioned as key factors to promoting Quality settings, the dimensions used to assess the achievement of such goals do not include practitioners' perspectives on their experience of ECE as active participants. Similarly, in the Chilean context, Pizarro & Espinoza (2016) mention that even though pedagogical practices implemented by practitioners are highly relevant in terms of promoting Quality ECE in Chile, there is still a lack of regulation in terms of the standards that should guide the initial training of practitioners. Also, Alarcón, Castro, Frites & Gajardo (2015) argue that national studies have shown deficiencies in initial training for practitioners in terms of heterogeneity in the curriculum development, low entry requirements, a lack of interdisciplinary work and overall, a lack of adherence to international standards regarding Quality ECE training.

Analysed from another perspective, it is important to take into account that by not including practitioners' perspectives in this study, I am also contributing to the complexities of the "official discourse", where on the one hand I am interpreting the importance of their role in terms of achieving Quality ECE in Chile, while on the other hand, I am excluding their perspectives in the construction of Quality ECE, and their role in its definition and achievement. In this sense, a limitation arises in terms of the research process, which will be analysed in Chapter 9 of the thesis.

Adding to the complexity of the practitioners' role in ECE, as the teaching profession has been undervalued by the socio-historic context, those who decide to follow this area of work are also defined in terms of their social class, race and gender, reaffirming the idea that practitioners are in some way different (and in

this sense, 'inferior') to those who are aligned with European views of society. In this sense, the idea of a 'double consciousness' within Chilean society is also reflected here, where practitioners are categorized within a lower social class, and thus, their knowledge is relativized or undervalued in comparison to the knowledge of 'experts' who seem to promote rational and 'universal' truths regarding education and ECE (Coronil, 2000; Mignolo, 2000). This in turn, reproduces colonial power relations within the educational system and promotes the achievement of 'universal' Quality goals rather than local perspectives and meanings relating ECE, obscuring the uniqueness of the Chilean teacher's socio-historic context, and undervaluing the practitioners' role by holding them accountable for the achievement of Quality, while silencing their perspectives and validating external discourses constructed by 'First World' countries.

### ***8.2.1 Early Childhood Education: A Women's issue.***

Cannella and Viruru (2003) argue that gender differences, developed from a European and North American male perspective, facilitate for the development of patriarchal and colonizing modes of power in education. Here, women have been and still are situated as 'inferior' beings. In this sense, as ECE has been generally associated with care, and caring of children has been at the same time associated with women, ECE becomes an area of education that suffers gendered assumptions particularly acutely, that is, as a place that helps develop 'feminine' attributes such as socio-emotional and communicational skills. Similarly, those who work on ECE are also thought of in this way (even more so due to the fact that most people who work in the field are women), and both the skills they need to have and the skills they need to develop in children are described in a more 'romantic' way (Davis et al., 2015).

In this thesis, there appears to be an association between the role of the practitioner, and the role of women in society as a whole. Specifically, there is a critique in terms of how the promotion of ECE as a relevant educational stage is subsumed to economic guidelines (and thus, heteronormative, rationalistic and scientific principles). In relation to this, associating practitioners' role with 'feminine' attributes (which have been defined mostly from an attitude of

European, white patriarchy), is something present in the 'official discourse' represented in this study, even when interpreting such discourse from the voice of three female stakeholders. In this sense, practitioners are described by the 'official discourse' as having the ability (presumed almost innate) of caring about their students, of being loving and close, and able to foster socio-emotional development in children, even without the presence of other factors (as described in this study). Thus, the image of the practitioner is generally thought of as a woman, a woman with a certain set of skills and capacities, and a woman who is automatically defined as one who loves and cares for children. Additionally, the set of skills which are used by the 'official discourse' in this study to describe the practitioner's role is closely linked to female attributes that are almost assumed present in every woman, regardless of the context in which she is immersed or her personal beliefs. This was also described by Zapata & Ceballos (2010) in their study of stakeholders' perspectives regarding the preschool teaching profession, where there seemed to be a "lack of gender perspective", reducing the early education teaching profession and thus, their identity, to a feminine role (p.1075).

In sum, practitioners appear to be positioned by the 'official discourse' in this study, in a constantly tense relationship with ECE and Quality, as on the one hand, they are described as key actors in achieving Quality, while at the same time are demanded to follow specific guidelines defined and described based on 'universal' notions of education and society, constructed by those in power. Similarly, when analysed through a postcolonial lens, there appears to be a potentiation of such tensions by the fact that within the Chilean context, there is a 'double consciousness' of aiming to a sort of Latin American Europeanness (Coronil, 2000; Mignolo, 2000), by acknowledging the country as being part of the Western Hemisphere, while at the same time separating it from 'First World' countries. Specifically, 'universal' Quality goals defined by the 'First World' are promoted to the detriment of local knowledge developed by practitioners in the classrooms, restricting teachers' autonomy and involvement in the construction of ECE.



This generates a complex and hybrid relationship that is reflected in the way Quality in ECE is conceptualised by the 'official discourse' in this study, and how practitioners are situated at the centre of those tensions. In this sense, the way practitioners' role is described by the 'official discourse' seems to reflect an overall conceptualisation of Quality that shifts between rationalistic, neo-colonial, and neoliberal definitions, to being understood as an undefined and context dependent concept. Here, Quality is viewed as a 'universal' and 'standardized' concept that can allow nations to become a 'developed' country, and at the same time, it is also described as contextual concept that needs to be defined locally, constantly shifting from one view to another. Thus, neither of both perspectives is an entirely pure one (the same way economic and humanistic approaches to Quality are never pure in their opposition in terms of their definition of the concept), but rather, they constitute themselves as complex hybrid ideas that are constantly in conflict, much as the way postcolonial discourses of First versus Third World nations are never pure reflections of the oppressor and the oppressed.

### **8.3 Children's Perspectives on their Preschool Experience: Active Participants in Reproducing/Resisting the 'Official Discourse' of Quality in ECE.**

As it was described in Chapter 7, interactions are a pivotal factor in how children in this study constructed meaning in relation to their preschool experience. I found that the relationship between children and adults was constructed in a complex manner, where the relation shifted from a hierarchical one established between students and teacher, to a much more reciprocal one. Thus, practitioners were positioned and children positioned themselves as key actors in terms of constructing and promoting meaningful preschool experiences. Similarly, children in this study developed power relations that shifted in terms of how those interactions were put into place, and how they influenced the way children make meaning of their preschool experience.

Participant children's experience of preschool, was constructed through their interactions with adults and other children. For children in this study, their relations were significant in terms of how they influenced the way they made sense of their experience, affecting as well, the way they valued this experience and how they engaged in the activities of everyday practice. Nonetheless, practitioners were recognized by the children as the responsible adults in the classroom. Furthermore, I as a researcher, once I immersed myself in the classroom setting, was also positioned by children as a responsible adult (even though the relationship they established with me was different than the one they had with their practitioner). Thus, taking this into account, although there was a recognition of authority which distinguishes this relationship from the one children established with other children, both relationships were valued and given significance by the children in this study, becoming an essential part of how they make sense of their preschool experience. By positioning these relationships at the centre of the ECE experience, children's perspectives in this study are in direct tension to how the 'official discourse' constructed meaning about Quality in ECE, in that both children and practitioners were given much more responsibility (from the perspective of children in this study) in terms of defining, implementing and reflecting on the preschool experience. Similarly, the perspective of children in this study also differed from Quality features as defined by the literature, particularly process features, in that they positioned themselves in a much more active role in contributing (or not) to the development of positive and meaningful interactions and activities within their ECE experience.

In relation to the participant children's perspectives on their own role, the way they viewed themselves involved much more agency in the construction of their preschool experience, as opposed to how the 'official discourse' in this study viewed them. In this sense, children situated themselves as more directly responsible for how their preschool experience was constructed, especially in developing meaningful socio-emotional relationships with the participants of the preschool setting. Specifically, my interpretation of how children in this study construct meaning of their ECE experience involves a much more complex and interconnected process that includes socio-emotional, pedagogical and physical interactions as part of a whole. Thus, children did not necessarily distinguish their

interactions with practitioners in terms of the type of activity they are engaged with, that is, between structured activities, for example, and informal conversations. They did not change the way they interacted with practitioners even if they engaged in teacher-student activities. Their interactions were nonetheless deeply influenced by the socio-emotional context, which ultimately influences how they make sense of their preschool experience.

Viewed from a postcolonial and feminist perspective, it could be argued that the notion that cognitive and socio-emotional experiences are somehow separate rests on a rationalistic and patriarchal discourse that is characteristic of Western thought (Cannella & Viruru, 2003). This influences how the ECE classroom is viewed, with more emphasis placed on cognitive elements of the classroom, and with socio-emotional skills defined in more ethereal and diffuse terms. Against this dominant point of view, as this study has shown, the participant children construct their experience in a more comprehensive way, where their interactions are constantly shifting both in terms of the power relations they establish with adults (moving from hierarchical and traditional forms of communication between students and teachers, to more reciprocal interactions that may include physical and emotional closeness), as well as the nature of the interaction itself.

However, this process of constructing meaning is also embedded in a broader context that influences the way these relationships are put into practice. In this sense, I recognized tensions related to how children in this study incorporate aspects of the 'official discourse' into their meaning making process, and how the preschool context may constrain such a process. Specifically, children in this study seem to identify themselves with more local conceptualisations that define the way in which they experience ECE (for example, in the way they establish close and more reciprocal relationships with their practitioners), as well as traditional conceptualisations such as being a 'student' or needing to 'learn things' that they do not learn in other contexts. In this sense, when asked about the reasons why they attended preschool, the participating children seem to shift from personal reasons generally associated with the relationships they established, to more 'universal' ideas related to their 'need' to learn things. In this last case, those who were recognized as the main responsible actors in providing 'knowledge'

were the practitioners, even though when analysing their interactions in the classroom, the experience of learning included interactions with other children to a significant degree. This reflects the complexities in children's conceptualisations of their ECE experience, where an apparently 'external' and more formal educational discourse is also present in children's meaning making, making their perspectives much more intricate and 'impure' in terms of how they define their experience and how they put their views into practice within a constrained context.

Similarly, tensions were also recognized in how children in this study identified with certain roles in terms of how they engaged in their learning experiences. Specifically, at times, the participating children seemed to position themselves in a more negative manner, especially when encountering challenging activities. In this sense, conceptualisations such as being 'too little' to know how to do something, were sometimes used as reasons not to engage in activities, or to abandon activities when found too difficult. However, many of those situations were also related to children looking to engage with others in the development of the activity. Thus, the relationships in which children in this study are embedded within the classroom context have an even more important role in this aspect, as they appear to be central in how they deal with situations of frustration or with feeling incapable. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge how this tension could be reflecting how the participating children may internalize conceptualisations coming from broader discourses of childhood, and how the idea of children being 'incomplete' or on their way to 'becoming' adults, can sometimes influence how they position themselves in front of a new or challenging task, and how their interactions with other children and with adults also influences how they will engage in these tasks.

### ***8.3.1 Children in the Official Discourse of Quality in ECE: Between Key Beneficiaries and Silent Participants.***

Children were positioned by the 'official discourse' in this study, as the key beneficiaries of ECE in Chile, and thus, of Quality in ECE. However, they were also relegated to a recipient position, where they appeared to only receive the results of adults' work in developing and promoting Quality in ECE in Chile.

Within the 'official discourse', children were rarely mentioned, and if they were, it was solely to describe them as the main beneficiaries of Quality ECE. However, when it came to defining Quality of ECE, children were left out, either as a factor of Quality, or as being somewhat responsible for achieving it. In this sense, children were regarded as passive recipients of the ECE experience, in terms that are defined externally by those considered 'experts' in the subject. The discourse of Quality in ECE is also related to a wider discourse of childhood, where children are viewed as a vulnerable group, and not as an active social group that influences and can be influenced by the broader socio-historical context (Corsaro, 2005; Davis et al., 2015; Mayall, 2002). This positioning is in tension with how children in this study view themselves in the process of constructing their ECE experience, where they appear as equally relevant participants in how such experience is perceived and valued. In this sense, the participating children attributed themselves much more responsibility in the process of constructing meaning about ECE, as well as in how the relationships between children and adults are configured, and how they influence the learning experience within the ECE setting. Thus, it could be argued that the 'official discourse' of Quality portrayed in this study, could constrain participating children's perspectives of their own role in their ECE experience, ultimately influencing how such experience is interpreted and valued by them.

Taking this tension into account, it appears as though the way in which children in this study position themselves and practitioners, in terms of defining their ECE experience and contributing to the development of positive interactions within their setting, relates to the alternative way of approaching ECE proposed by Dahlberg et al. (1999; 2000). In this sense, the participating children construct

their experience through their relationships and the emotions they feel when interacting in the ECE setting. Thus, their perspective on preschool affects the way they engage with their ECE context, just as the context changes the way they construct meaning about it, highlighting its provisional and subjective nature of their 'meaning making' process (Moss et al, 2000). Additionally, children in this study position themselves, other children and adults as active participants in constructing their ECE experience, contributing (or not) to developing significant interactions within that context. Even though their experience seems to be linked to personal relationships and emotions evoked from their interactions and the activities they engage with within the preschool, broader discourses about Quality ECE are also present in their 'meaning making process', which allows me to interpret that their views are influenced by the context in which they are immersed, as well as the social and political discourses that lie behind the concept of Quality.

In contrast, the 'official discourse' analysed in this thesis seems to rely on adult-centred perspectives developed through 'scientific' approaches that position children in a more passive role when it comes to defining the ECE experience as well as the features and factors of Quality in ECE. Similarly, practitioners are put in a problematic position that demands from them a series of actions and skills in order to promote Quality, while at the same time reducing their involvement to the implementation of specific strategies and policies rather than their design, assessment and critique. Thus, it becomes highly relevant to acknowledge that the results of this thesis allow us to understand ECE and the experience of preschool through an alternative lens that positions children at the centre of their experience, not just in terms of beneficiaries of a service provided by adults, but as active contributors to the relationships, interactions and activities that are put into practice in their preschool setting. For this reason, alternative ways of constructing meaning about ECE such as the one proposed by Dahlberg et al. (1999, 2000) can be useful in terms of developing spaces that enable different actors of the ECE community to get involved in the process of 'meaning making', understanding that the ECE experience is always constructed from the perspective of those who participate in it and thus, it is always provisional and subjective in nature. I will return to this point in Chapter 9.

## 8.4 Summary of Chapter

In sum, it is possible to understand the way practitioners in this study were positioned by the 'official discourse' and by children's perspectives as reflecting tensions related to broader dynamics in the socio-historical context. Thus, the role given to practitioners in this study and the conceptualisation of Quality for this educational stage reflects power relations established through neo-colonial discourses, reproducing ambiguities in its definition that allow for a 'double consciousness' to be put into practice. In this context, practitioners remain in a diffuse role, where they are pressured to achieve ambiguous goals, in ambiguous circumstances, while at the same time being constrained by the context and idealized in their role as teachers.

On the other hand, children were also positioned in an ambiguous role by the 'official discourse' analysed in this study, where they were described as the key beneficiaries of Quality in ECE, while the setting in which they were immersed was externally defined by adults. However, children in this study viewed themselves in a more involved manner, as being directly responsible for how the ECE experience is valued by them. Such perspectives include and are influenced by the tensions and constraints present in the children's broader context of ECE and their everyday practice. Thus, it becomes particularly important to reflect on how children themselves view their role in terms of constructing meaningful experiences of preschool, and how such meanings can influence how Quality is viewed, and furthermore, how Quality as a concept can be contested within a perspective that highlights and promotes local co-constructed knowledge.

Since children in this study constructed meaning in relation to their preschool experience in a more holistic and inclusive manner than the official discourse, a possibility appears in terms of promoting a more involved role for practitioners as well as children. In this sense, it becomes possible to create spaces where these actors' voices are heard, and not only heard, but valued as a key part in making sense of the preschool experience, by developing a local and meaningful

understanding that reflects on how such settings can reproduce and/or resist hegemonic discourses of education and ECE. In the concluding Chapter, I will discuss the potential contributions of this thesis in that regard, and discuss possibilities for creating reflexive spaces that promote the questioning of hegemonic discourses in ECE.



## **Chapter 9. Conclusion**

### **9.1 Introduction**

In this thesis, I have explored the conceptualisation of Quality in ECE in Chile, constructed and interpreted by the 'official discourse', the meaning making process of children in relation to their preschool experience in a specific setting in a public ECE institution in Chile, and the relations, tensions and contradictions between both perspectives. By developing a thematic analysis with a postcolonial and feminist perspective, I aimed to critically understand how both perspectives interconnect and influence each other, questioning and/or reproducing broader inequalities present in Chilean society. In Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I developed a series of ideas regarding the tensions and contradictions present both within the discourses analysed as well as between them. Furthermore, my research was able to develop arguments to support the idea that practitioners and children's roles in a particular ECE setting, can be paralleled to broader tensions present in the ECE discourse of Quality in Chile, and how such tensions promote the development of initiatives and policies based on neo-colonial, neoliberal and patriarchal notions of society, deepening the power relations established by a capitalist social system.

In this Chapter, I will conclude the discussions surrounding the main findings of the empirical and discussion Chapters 6, 7 and 8. I will relate the main findings to the broader context of ECE in Chile, and the contributions this study has to make in terms of promoting critical discussions surrounding conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile. Lastly, I will discuss the limitations of the study, and future areas of research to expand on the critical discussions, reflecting on the relevance of the research topic, and its significance to developing spaces of transformation within the educational system.

## **9.2 Theoretical Contributions: Questioning the Discourse of Quality in ECE in Chile from the Margins.**

As I argued in Chapters 6 and 8 of this thesis, the official discourse of Quality, is an externally imposed one, where most of the features and factors described come from international literature and standardized measurements that do not necessarily coincide with how ECE is viewed locally, or by children in this study. Nonetheless, even though this discourse is deeply embedded in how the official documents and stakeholders interviewed describe Quality, the 'official discourse' in this study also recognizes the importance of the context and the actors involved in ECE when defining Quality in the field. However, while standardized structural and process factors can be clearly identified both in the 'official discourse' analysed in this study and the participating children's conceptualization of their ECE experience, aspects related to local knowledge and experience are much more diffusely described as to how they should be addressed and how exactly they inform educational policies of Quality in ECE in Chile. Thus, this seems to reflect tensions at a broader level of analysis, that is, of a concept linked to a neoliberal, rationalistic, patriarchal conception of society, rooted in Europe and later in the U.S.

Chile's history of education and the fact that a neoliberal model was imposed in the country during the dictatorship, fostered and reproduced the power relations established then, by positioning 'First world' countries as those with privileged access to the 'right' knowledge and thus, to be followed in how they organized their nations, and specifically, how they viewed education and ECE. Similarly, once the dictatorship was established and the educational system was deeply transformed (Klein, 2007), the power relations developed between Chile and European countries and the U.S. were reproduced within the country, where only a few 'possess' the knowledge of how education ought to work, and only a few have access to 'Quality' education (Pardo & Woodrow, 2014). In this sense, the discourse of Quality in ECE reflects broader power struggles within the country, where a 'double consciousness' about our place within the neoliberal system, allows for contradictions to arise from adopting initiatives developed by those in

power that aim at achieving 'universal' goals, and at the same time, remaining excluded from the group of countries that are said to 'achieve' such goals.

Drawing from these reflections, a theoretical contribution can be argued for. It is possible to develop critical discussions that aim at deeply analysing the way the concept of Quality in ECE is defined and constructed. In this respect, such discussions would take into account the local socio-historical context, including postcolonial and critical perspectives that aim to develop a local construction of Quality. Moreover, reflections around these issues could enable the questioning of the use of Quality as a concept, by developing local understandings of what ECE is. In this sense, Latin American postcolonial perspectives coincide on the idea of constructing knowledge that is built from the 'Us', instead of the 'Them' as a form of resistance towards hegemonic neo-colonial and neoliberal discourse (Cabaluz, 2015; Mejía, 2011). This distinction does not aim at describing the relation between colonizers and colonized as if it were dichotomic, but on the contrary, it is thought to promote the development of local theories and understandings of the complex relationship between Latin America and the hegemonic discourse, as well as the power relations established between different nations and within them, as a result of this complex and 'impure' binary. For Latin American postcolonial perspectives, knowledge that acknowledges other worldviews, knowledge that is locally rooted, as well as other ways of organizing society, can promote the questioning and contesting of the universal thought of rationalism and the liberal world which presents itself as if it were the only desirable form of social order. In this sense, Latin American critical perspectives rely on a set of ideas that aim to promote critical and transformative discussions around social issues, that is 1) an idea of community and participation in popular forms of knowing, built around relationships; 2) the idea of liberation through praxis, which entails mobilizing our consciousness and a critical sense that denaturalizes traditional forms of apprehending and being in the world; 3) redefining the role of social researchers by recognizing the Other as its own self and thus, as an active social participant and constructor of knowledge; 4) the historical, situated and undefined character of knowledge (as opposed to a universal and linear form of thinking) including multiple voices, worldviews and epistemic plurality; the tensions between reproducing and resisting, as well as

knowing and doing; 6) and finally, a constant questioning of practice methods as well as the transformations and contributions these methods can bring (Mejía, 2011).

This thesis contributes to the theoretical discussion of the conceptualisation of Quality in ECE, by questioning its use and hegemonic definition in the context of Chile, and including children's perspectives of their ECE experience, constructed in relation to the local setting in which they are embedded. Additionally, this research contributes to promoting the creation of reflexive spaces within academia that aim to question taken-for-granted concepts used in ECE education. In this sense, by promoting the development of local reflections not only in relation to the achievement of Quality goals, but for the critical analysis of such concepts, it is possible to develop local knowledge in terms of how ECE and ECE policies reflect broader tensions within the educational system, as well as the Chilean society. Similarly, this thesis contributes by fostering discussions coming from the 'margins', that is, recognizing the presence of a 'double consciousness' in our society, and acknowledging the complexities and tensions present in any ECE setting (including the ones recognized in my role as a researcher), and its relation to broader social issues (Coronil, 2000; Rodríguez, 2015).

Lastly, this thesis also contributes to the theoretical discussion of alternative ways to defining the ECE experience, by questioning the use of the concept of Quality, and expanding on the idea of 'meaning-making' as a way of contesting hegemonic discourses by promoting local and community knowledge that stems 'from the margins', rather than adapts to a specific concept. In this sense, by not attempting to reduce children's experiences to a particular definition of Quality, I was able to shed light on the fact that even though there has been an effort to define quality as a subjective and culturally dependent concept, the concept itself is constructed within a very specific discourse, that is, a colonial and neoliberal discourse that still subjugates learning outcomes and developmental goals to universal standards that are constructed from a Eurocentric perspective. Thus, this thesis focuses on the need to question the use of the concept of Quality as a subjective one, by describing its relation to a colonial, universal and neoliberal

discourse. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to the construction of other forms of understanding the ECE experience, by analysing children's perspectives in terms of the way they construct meaning of such experience, and not in terms of how such meanings "fit" into a particular definition of Quality. This relates to the empirical contributions of this thesis that involves developing alternative spaces to construct meaning about ECE, which will be explained in the following section.

### **9.3 Empirical Contributions: Constructing Transformative Spaces in ECE Practice.**

Although it is important to recognize the theoretical contributions of this study to the discussion of Quality in ECE in Chile, it is also important to acknowledge that according to the argument of this thesis, it is not possible to develop a critical and transformative reflection around ECE, without including local perspectives. In this sense, it is necessary to include the perspectives of those who are directly embedded in the ECE context, positioning them at the centre of the co-constructions of meaning of the ECE experience. Thus, this research contributes to the creation of transformative spaces within a local context, by including children's perspectives into the discussion of hegemonic discourses regarding ECE. Additionally, the findings discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, focus on analysing how the role of practitioners and children in this study reflect broader tensions within educational and social discourses in Chile, highlighting the importance of analysing the way in which these social actors influence and are influenced by hegemonic and local discourses in tension.

When analysing children's meaning making of their ECE experience in this study, it appears local knowledge, socio-emotional interactions and children's participation in their settings are the most relevant aspects mentioned by them. Similarly, practitioners are put by the participating children at the centre of the preschool experience together with them, where their relationship is constantly shifting from a more hierarchical one established by their roles as teacher and student, to a much more reciprocal one based on socio-emotional interactions. Thus, the role children in this study construct for themselves as well as the

practitioners, includes an apparent attribution of direct responsibility as to how the ECE experience is defined and valued by them. Additionally, the participating children appear to construct meaning in relation to their preschool experience drawing directly from the activities they engage with, the knowledge they acquire, the relationships they build, and how these relationships constantly shift in terms of power (while at the same time recognizing the authority of adults imposed by the context). Thus, practice becomes much more relevant than theoretical or universal notions of ECE when children in this study value and make meaning about their preschool experience.

By putting the interactions between practitioners and children at the centre of the ECE experience, it is possible to construct local understandings of ECE, giving key social actors a space to express their ideas and beliefs. Thus, this research contributes to the questioning of broader discourses of Quality in ECE, by contrasting the process of 'meaning making' from a local and personal perspective constructed by children, and acknowledging the importance of recognizing their position as active participants and contributors to the development of their ECE setting. In a similar way, this research contributes to discussing the arguably obsolete value of the concept of Quality when it comes to analysing ECE practice in a Chilean setting, as Quality is a concept defined by specific powerful groups that promote patriarchal, neo-colonial and neoliberal forms of thinking. In this sense, centring the focus of ECE in local experiences and local practice, where children and adults position themselves as key agents in the construction of meaningful and valued experiences in preschool, allows for the contesting of the passive role given to them by the 'official discourse' analysed in this study. Additionally, by focusing on the interactions between practitioners and children, and how they themselves construct meaning about such relationships, ECE can be defined by these actors as they create their own ideas and concepts regarding the experience of preschool, repositioning aspects often associated with 'inferior' groups of people (like women or children), to a more relevant position. Moreover, this approach can also allow to contest misogynist and patriarchal notions of what ECE constitutes, and how Quality as a concept plays a central role in its reproduction.

Lastly, if analysed within the current social context of Chile in terms of ECE and education in general, it becomes even more relevant to foster practical and empirical approaches to developing spaces in which it is possible to reflect and discuss the concepts associated with education inside the educational institutions. Here, the co-construction of such spaces, allows key social actors to analyse current educational reforms taking place, from a critical perspective, including the relations established between different stakeholders involved in the definition, design and implementation of educational policies, and how such settings reflect broader power relations within the social context. In particular, by adopting an approach focused on 'meaning making' rather than the Quality discourse within ECE settings, allows for the inclusion of different perspectives coming from key actors (that is, children and practitioners) when constructing the meaning of ECE, understanding its provisionality as well as the influences that broader discourses have on the way they understand, interpret and get involved in their preschool settings. In this sense, emphasizing the importance of rescuing local perspectives of ECE to understand and question neoliberal and patriarchal discourses that reduce the role of children and practitioners to a passive one, will not only promote the transformation of practices within the preschool settings, but also the way in which ECE discourses are constructed and implemented as 'truths' by the 'official discourse'. In relation to this, Ang & Wong (2015) argue that the 'hidden and unofficial curriculum of embedded sociocultural beliefs and understandings about teaching and learning is equally or even more important in guiding practitioners to their work with children' (p.194). In this sense, creating a space that allows for meaning making process to be established, promotes the sharing of implicit knowledge that practitioners and children have regarding their ECE experience.

However, it is important to understand that in the Chilean context of ECE, there are several bureaucratic restrictions that limit the possibilities for other types of discourses to be developed, as well as in the research field itself. Thus, it is imperative to take into account that the development of alternative spaces to discuss concepts associated with ECE needs to be disruptive not only in terms of what is discussed, but also in terms of how those spaces are created. In this sense, a postcolonial feminist perspective to discussing such issues can help

counteract the restrictions of the Chilean setting, by contesting for example the way in which decisions are made within the classroom and ECE institutions. For example, discussions regarding the activities that will be implemented in the classroom, the objectives of such activities, the role children have in their formation (including their perspective in terms of how they want to be positioned and what they can contribute to their own educational process), can serve as potential spaces where horizontal discussions can take place (always acknowledging broader social, ideological and political restrictions coming from the larger context of Chile). Nonetheless, empirical and methodological limitations are also present when attempting to promote alternative ways of constructing meaning about ECE. I will elaborate on such limitations in the last section of this Chapter.

#### **9.4 Methodological Contributions: Fostering Discussions on Researching with Children.**

In relation to the methodological significance of this study, there are a series of contributions linked to developing critical methods that aim at questioning hegemonic ideologies in education, not only at a theoretical level but also in the field of research with children. Firstly, the use of 'bricolage' as a methodological approach in the discussion and analysis of Quality in ECE in Chile from a critical, postcolonial and feminist standpoint, promotes the further development of a still reduced space of critique towards hegemonic discourses present in ECE in the country. In this sense, by using a postcolonial feminist perspective in the analysis of a specific ECE setting in Chile, my research contributes to the discussion of educational policies as it stresses new questions and interrogations of the educational system in Chile, contesting traditional approaches to researching these issues in the country, and widening the boundaries of qualitative investigations in the area.

As a researcher, I aimed to include ideas and conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile, both coming from those who participate in the study as well as my own. Similarly, I included an exploration of the historical and social processes that influence such conceptualisations, constructing an interpretation of how the



concept of Quality is embedded in the 'official discourse' analysed in this study, and how such a concept influences the ways in which the participating children make meaning of their experience in preschool. This interpretation included several viewpoints (the 'official discourse' interpreted through the views of stakeholders and official documents, children, my own positionality), constructing a dialogue informed by feminist postcolonial theory, as well as diverse methods to gather information. Additionally, as Kincheloe (2001) describes, the approach of bricolage allowed for bridges to be built between disciplines as well as theoretical and methodological frameworks, in order to develop a more nuanced understanding in the research process. Thus, my investigation contributes to the further development of this methodological approach in the research of ECE policies and conceptualisations, not only by including different theoretical perspectives into the analysis, but also by including my multi-layered positionality as a researcher into the reflections of the ongoing research study. In this sense, I also created bridges within the different aspects of my positionality, that allowed me to delve into the critique of conceptualisations present in the ECE discourse in Chile (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In relation to this, by including my own emotions and thoughts into the analysis process, not only as a form of acknowledging and situating my positionality towards the research project but also as relevant data, I was able to develop a more nuanced interpretation of children's meaning making about their preschool experience. By using my own emotions as data, my analysis was informed not only by being a witness to children's interactions and relationships in the classroom, but also by engaging in interactions with them and experiencing emotions regarding our relationship, as well as in relation to their classroom practices. Thereby, my interpretation became enriched by the emotions I felt during the data collection, as it helped me further understand children's emotions and meanings in relation to their preschool setting, and to develop a nuanced interpretation of their preschool experiences. In this sense, the use of emotions as data can allow for the development of meaningful methodological strategies, especially when positioning oneself from a subjective approach to investigation, and when engaging in intimate and close relationships with the participants of the study (Widdowfield, 2000). Additionally, by being aware of my own emotions and my positionality as an adult researcher, I was able to acknowledge a series of limitations that stemmed from the way I designed

my investigation, which enabled me to modify and change my approach to children and their role within my study. For example, by recognizing that my interpretation of their experience is restricted by adult views, and that by not including the participating children in the analysis process, the conceptualizations I developed for this study could also be contested by them, as they are tinged by my own discourses and beliefs.

Secondly, and in relation to the last point described, by implementing a series of participatory and visual methods for researching with children, this study contributes to the development of participatory research methods in ECE, aiming to create strategies that include the voices of children in a more genuine manner, and to promote the discussion of approaches to researching with children. In this sense, even though methods including children's voices have been developed during the last few years (Clark & Moss, 2011; Christensen & James, 2000; Fisher & Wood, 2012; Mayall, 2002; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009), there is still a lack of research in Chile that focuses on children's perspectives in relation to their ECE experience, as well as the way they construct meaning about such experience.

By including different participatory and visual methods, children were able to express themselves through different forms of communication by giving them partial control to choose how to construct meaning in relation to their ECE experience (Derbyshire et al., 2005). In this sense, this research contributes to developing a 'meaning making' space for children (Dahlberg et al., 1999), acknowledging the complexity of children's perspectives, not only in terms of their ways of communicating, but also in how their experience is constrained by the setting in which they are embedded. Thus, this research can serve as a starting point to develop more participatory approaches to research with children, and to construct spaces for the construction of local meanings regarding ECE. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the approach I developed for this thesis, even though it centres on children's experiences of preschool, still focuses the analysis from an adult's perspective (my own). Thus, it is essential to understand that the use of participatory methods with children needs to incorporate a permanent reflection on the limitations coming from an adult-

centred context of research, whether it be in terms of designing investigations that aim to include children in an active role (while maintaining traditional forms of academic research), as well as in terms of analysing ECE settings acknowledging their subjectivity, and the importance of including emotional, cultural, social and individual factors to construct meaning about preschool experiences.

## **9.5 Limitations of the Study and Guidelines for Future Research**

As I mentioned in the last section, my research contributes to the study of the discourse of Quality in ECE in Chile through a series of aspects. Nonetheless, limitations arise from the research process that need to be considered to develop future areas of investigation.

Firstly, as I aimed to develop participatory strategies to research with children, several challenges were present throughout the process, especially in terms of implementing genuine participatory methods within highly structured and bureaucratic settings. In this sense, dealing with the constraints of the context such as space limitations, constant changes in the schedule and everyday contingencies within the preschool, it was difficult to maintain continuity in the implementation of the activities designed. Furthermore, constraints within the research procedure itself were present (for instance, in terms of the structure of my PhD and the restrictions imposed by my scholarship), as well as constraints arising from the highly structured context of ECE in Chile, which did not allow me to include children as active participants in every stage of the research process (Tabali & Torres, 2017). Specifically, restrictions relating to bureaucratic aspects coming both from educational settings in Chile as well as from the academia, affected the way I included children as participants, having to concede to institutional requirements that did not necessarily facilitate positioning children as active researchers. In a similar manner, my own limitations as an adult researcher contributed to the narrowing of the role of children as active participants of their 'meaning making' process as it appeared throughout the thesis. Thus, challenges remain in terms of developing participatory methods that include children

throughout the whole research process, acknowledging that the interpretation process is never an objective one, and that co-constructing the analysis of children's perspectives with them, allows for a deeper and more meaningful understanding of their experiences.

Closely related to limitations of developing research with children, are challenges regarding the implementation of genuine participatory techniques and dealing with constant adaptations and shifts in the relationship established with children in the study. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that research involving children entails the constant adaptation and change of strategies and activities (Tabali & Torres, 2017). Thus, it is necessary to be conscious of the fact that, even though it is possible to develop participatory methods for working with children, our limitations as adults will always be present when interpreting children's needs.

My limitations regarding my positionality as an adult researcher challenged me to develop adaptations to the methodology initially designed, and to reflect on my work as an investigator throughout the whole research process. However, as working with children involves the development of close and trustworthy relationships between researchers and children, traditional ethical procedures sometimes restrict possibilities to engage in meaningful and genuine interactions within the research setting, as they are constructed based on adult assumptions, and a discourse of childhood that generally positions them as a vulnerable social group in need of protection (Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Bae, 2010; Christensen, 2004). Additionally, as there is still a lack of literature focused on the practical challenges of researching with children, my reflections were guided by somewhat 'naive' notions of the complexities embedded in the relationship established between adults and children. Thus, limitations in my research are related to the need for developing new and different strategies to engage with children. Nonetheless, this limitation allowed for the development of new reflections around issues of researching with children, and how to promote genuine and meaningful methodologies that allow children and adults to create co-constructive spaces. Additionally, these reflections can foster future research that focuses not only on the contents of the reflections developed, but also on the methodological

implications of researching from a participatory and critical approach, reflecting and creating guidelines that are constructed within reflexive spaces that include children as active co-constructors of the research process.

In relation to this limitation, future research needs to recognize the importance of firstly, including children in the research of ECE in Chile, and secondly, of implementing strategies that allow children to communicate their views in multiple ways (Tabali & Torres, 2017). It should be possible to develop co-constructive spaces to reflect and question broader hegemonic discourses that influence and are influenced by children's experiences. In this sense, future investigations should focus on developing such reflective spaces within the preschools, including the whole learning community. Such research could be guided by the concept of 'meaning making' described by Moss, Dahlberg and Pence (1999), to develop reflective spaces within ECE in Chile. For these authors, the process of constructing meaning always takes place in relationships with others, where local conceptualisations of ECE are co-constructed by all key actors involved. As such, there will always be a political dimension to this meaning making process, as it allows for the constant reflection and critique of the purpose of ECE, and its relation to broader social discourses:

The process is not only intrinsically dialogic, but also explicitly political. It recognizes different views and perspectives and the need for argumentation in the search for provisional agreements. All stages of meaning making are done in the context of an ongoing process of democratic debate about a range of critical questions: What do we want for our children? What is our understanding of the early childhood institutions and its relation to society? What do we mean by 'care' and 'education'? (Moss, 2010, p. 414)

If there is a possibility then, for contesting the postcolonial discourse, it is within the relations developed between adults and children in ECE. Through these relationships, power relations become more diffuse, and can shift from one to the other, especially in terms of socio-emotional aspects that foster learning (whether it be learning traditional skills, as well as learning about everyday life issues). Thus, if meaning making is put at the centre of understanding ECE, with children and adults as key agents of its construction, it would be possible to develop spaces that allow children to engage in reflexive interactions, to learn from local

knowledge, and to develop cognitive, physical and socio-emotional skills, taking into account their own views about their learning process, as well as the setting in which they are embedded in an everyday basis.

By centring the reflections and discussions around the ideas of critical pedagogy and resistance of the postcolonial system, it is possible to establish conscious and reflective practices that position practitioners and children at the centre of ECE experiences, allowing them to construct meaning about such experience, and thus, develop meaningful practices and interactions that foster ways of learning and ways of knowing that are significant to those actors who are directly involved in the experience of preschool. By giving them actual voice in their own experiences of ECE, key actors in ECE can also contest hegemonic conceptualisations made of Quality in ECE, and redefine their role within the construction and contesting of hegemonic discourses, acknowledging the socio-historical and political complexities and constraints present in ECE settings. Additionally, this discussion can be broadened to the whole Chilean educational system, reflecting and contesting current conceptualisations used in the discourse of education, and the educational reforms taking place in the present.

In this sense, a research design that included the participation of children in other stages of the research process, especially in terms of designing the activities and analysing the results, would have allowed me to deepen my understanding of their ECE experience, as well as acknowledging that ultimately, it is their own understanding of such experience that matters, and that their interpretations and conceptualizations are directly connected to the way in which they engage in their preschool setting. In this regard, several studies have been conducted over the last decades including children at different stages of the research process. For example, Millei and Gallagher (2011) developed a research project where they asked children about their perceptions of their bathroom facilities in preschool settings, and then built a collaborative team with children and practitioners to develop alternatives that would include children's needs in relation to the bathroom facilities. Another example is the one developed by the Children's Research Centre at the Open University UK (Kellett, 2011) where a programme of research training was implemented for children and young people, in which

they constructed a “think sheet” that helped them identify their research interests. In another study, Roberts, Perry and Dockett (2013) worked with children as an advice group in a doctoral research project, where they were asked about the research topic, methods for investigating it and strategies for the analysis. Similarly, Gray & Winter (2011) also worked with children from a participatory approach, including them from the data gathering process up to the dissemination stage, having different tools available for the children to work with. Specifically, they mention that children were capable of analysing the strengths and challenges of working with different data gathering tools, as well as the way in which the results of a research project are disseminated. In this sense, all of these studies include children not only in the data gathering process, but they also include them in the design, analysis process, dissemination of results, and more importantly, in the transformation of their local settings. As Fielding (2011) proposes, children can participate in the process of designing the policies that govern them. He argues for an approach in research that does not focus on using children’s voices to improve educational settings and gain competitiveness, but rather it focuses on a “person centred education for democratic fellowship” (p.10), where children are included in the collaborative process of constructing meaning about their educational settings, and also contribute to the design of local policies relating their lived experiences. Thus, a way of approaching the limitations of this research is to use an approach to research that allows not only for children to participate in every stage of the investigation, but that also includes them in the transformation of their settings, contesting hegemonic discourses that restrict their involvement to a passive role.

Specifically, the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach appears as a possibility, in which children can be included in every stage of the process in active manner, positioning them as social actors that have influence and agency in their own contexts. Groundwater-Smith et al. (2014) define PAR as an approach that “frames research as both investigation and intervention – where, in addition to the research outcomes, participation itself generates new knowledge for those involved” (p.36). Similarly, Shamrova & Cummings (2017) argue that PAR is not “a research method by itself, rather it is a post-constructivist epistemological orientation that highlights the importance of subjective

experiences in knowledge construction” (p.401). Thus, the use of a PAR approach can allow for the construction of an alternative space that questions traditional ways of including children in the research process, and gives attention to their lived experiences and perspectives when constructing meaning regarding their local contexts.

In particular, PAR is implemented in cycles where participants actively engage in identifying their needs, problems or issues that they want to investigate, they then design a course of action to enquire on such issues, and finally implement the actions in their own setting. When conducting PAR with children, Clark (2010) argues that this approach to research can foster the construction of spaces where issues of power and knowledge are readdressed through “the exploration of democratic forms of knowledge-building” (Clark, 2010, p.116). In this sense, working with a PAR approach can allow for the “inversion” of power roles in terms of who defines the research questions, who designs the methods and who analyses the data and generates the products of the investigation.

When using PAR, children lived experiences and perspectives are valued and promoted. By positioning them as co-researchers there is an attempt at sharing power within the research settings. Moreover, when working with children in educational contexts, the use of PAR can allow for children to make or construct meaning around their learning experiences, understanding them in their own local contexts (Clark, 2010). Thus, the notion of meaning-making when defining the ECE experience in Chile can be implemented through the use of a PAR approach that enables children to immerse themselves in the research project as genuine co-researchers, constructing meanings regarding their perspectives on preschool.

Although this research approach appears to be a helpful tool to include children as co-researchers in their educational settings, it is important to acknowledge the challenges that may arise when developing such studies. For example, Shamrova & Cummings (2017) describe a series of recommendations that should be taken into account in order to secure children’s genuine participation: a) firstly, children as co-researchers need to participate in specific training that allows them



to build trust in terms of their investigative abilities and also in their relationship with adult researchers, especially for children positioned in other marginalized groups (i.e. race, gender, socioeconomic status, among others); b) child-friendly data collection tools: use of data collection tools that promotes interest in children of different ages and capabilities (i.e. body mapping, photographs, drawings, among others); c) Involvement in data analysis: including children not only in the definition of the research questions and data gathering methods, but also in the analysis process, for instance by developing reflection workshops, group theming exercises or data analysis games that foster children's enquiry skills; and d) meaningful venues for dissemination: allowing children to choose where it is important for them to show the results of their work in terms of the possibilities of making real changes in their settings.

From another perspective, PAR has also been developed largely in vulnerable contexts, including participants from marginalized groups in research projects (Clark, 2010). In this sense, a PAR approach is also helpful when aiming at developing research spaces that include not only children but also practitioners, teaching assistants, parents and the rest of the educational community, engaging them in every step of the investigation, and creating actions and interventions that look to improve the local settings in which they are immersed. Particularly, PAR has been developed widely in Latin American settings, especially when working with marginalized groups (Contreras, 2002), where some of the more important exponents of this kind of approach to research in the field of education have been Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals-Borda (Flores-Kastanis, Montoya-Vargas & Suárez, 2009). Thus, the use of this research and epistemological approach in the Chilean preschool education context appears as a real possibility, where different stakeholders can get involved in the construction of investigations that have an impact in their everyday experiences, and at the same time, allow them to question hegemonic discourses that position them in a passive manner in terms of their influence in how ECE is understood and performed. Furthermore, as Clark (2010) argues, visual methods as well as other creative data gathering tools could help practitioners and parents to "reflect on and share their perspectives of their environment" (p. 122), allowing them to engage in conversations where children and adults are positioned equally in terms of their

power in transforming their local context. Thus, by suggesting that research regarding ECE experiences and meaning-making could be designed from a PAR perspective, it is also possible to include other stakeholders' perspectives and to construct knowledge "from the margins", that is, knowledge that is built from their local contexts, contesting hegemonic discourses around the concept of Quality in ECE.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that even though there has been a set of studies that have used PAR as their methodological approach, there is still a lack of research where children have been included as active participants. According to Shamrova & Cummings (2017), in their systematic review of PAR studies with children, only 27% of the papers reviewed described research conducted in 'developing countries', showing a disproportion in terms of the amount of research focused on issues that are important for children in 'developed countries' versus important issues for children coming from developing countries. Moreover, of the 12 (27%) papers conducted in developing countries, eight were designed and implemented in partnership with researchers coming from the 'developed world'. This could be explained by the social role that is given to children in 'developing countries' or patriarchal communities, where they are viewed as lacking the sufficient skills to make decisions that affect their lives, or are discouraged to give their opinion or raise their voice in specific issues. In this sense, it is important to note that even though this kind of research could be implemented in Chile, broader discourses of childhood could become an impediment to truly engaging children as co-researchers in every stage of the investigation. Thus, even though the use of PAR could be helpful in including children and other stakeholders as active participants and co-researchers, it is important to acknowledge the local challenges and underlying discourses that could affect the development of genuine participative research, especially taking into account the bureaucratic restrictions that the educational context in Chile presents.

Lastly, as described in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, practitioners appear both in the 'official discourse' analysed from the perspective of stakeholders and official documents, as well as children's perspectives regarding their ECE experience, with several tensions and contradictions relating the role they have in developing positive ECE settings. Thus, as my research did not include practitioners' views on their ECE experience, a great limitation can be recognized in terms of contrasting different perspectives, and moreover, including practitioners' reflections and conceptualizations of ECE to develop a more nuanced understanding of the preschool experience, and how key actors' such as children and practitioners define their relationship, as well as the way in which they engage with different practices within the preschool. Similarly, including practitioners' views of their role within ECE would have allowed me to delve into the contradictions and tensions that arise from analysing the 'official discourse' in this study in terms of how it positions practitioners, and how such positioning may reproduce neoliberal and patriarchal discourses that limit how ECE teachers influence and affect the way in which preschool settings are developed. Moreover, by designing research that includes practitioners and children at every stage of the study (design, data recollection, analysis and dissemination), it would be possible to establish a space where 'meaning making' processes can take place, by allowing each participant to construct meaning in relation to their personal experiences as well as in connection with the other participants. Thus, it is important to work towards research that includes every actor of the educational community, not only in terms of analysing their role from an external point of view, but on the contrary, to design studies that acknowledge the importance of the participants' experiences within their ECE setting and their contribution to constructing positive spaces for the education of children.

Constructing a space where the participating children had more autonomy in terms of the decisions they make, and the focus they wished to give to the analysis of their experience, as well as broadening the key actors that are involved in their process of 'meaning making', would have allowed me to more fully recognize the importance of the practitioners' role in how children in this study constructed their ECE experience. Particularly, as the context of ECE in Chile is still highly structured and bureaucratic in terms of the autonomy different

actors of the educational community have to develop critical reflections on their experience, I believe that arguing for the development of research studies that include them not only as active participants but also as co-researchers, could promote critical reflections that ultimately are transferred into the classroom through different interactions and practices that at the same time, could promote the construction of more democratic ECE settings. Nonetheless, it is important to take into account the restrictions of the Chilean context in order to design research that contributes to the development of positive ECE experiences, as defined by all of the stakeholders involved.

## **9.6 Summary of Chapter and Final Reflections**

This thesis sought to critique conceptualisations of Quality in ECE in Chile, both in terms of the 'official discourse' and in terms of children's perspectives on their preschool experiences. Here it investigated how the broader discourse of Quality influences the way children in this study construct and value their preschool experience. In this sense, this research reflected on the complexities of the power relations established in an ECE setting, not only within ECE institutions but also between the practice of ECE and the design of broader social policies involving children. By using a postcolonial and feminist perspective to delve into the tensions and contradictions present in the discourse of Quality in ECE in Chile, I was able to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complex and hybrid nature of the relations established between those who hold power and those who are positioned as vulnerable social groups. Similarly, questioning the use of 'universal' concepts allowed me to reflect on how the socio-historical context of Chile still influences the way educational policies are designed and implemented, and how the inequalities present in the system can be contested through the creation of transformative spaces of local knowledge construction.

Lastly, through this thesis, I was able to develop nuanced reflections regarding the ethical responsibilities researchers have towards the creation of transformative spaces for resistance. In this regard, it is not only necessary to develop research focused on participatory approaches that include the perspective of every social actor involved in the practice of ECE, but it is also paramount to engage in critical discussions involving our role as researchers of the educational system, and our responsibility in acknowledging that we are not necessarily experts, or at least not the only experts in the field we seek to study. It is important to acknowledge, help facilitate, and listen to the local expertise of those who are embedded in educational settings where they exhibit this expertise in their everyday practice. In this sense, it is important to develop reciprocal relations between all research participants that allows for co-constructing local knowledge regarding the critical analysis of educational policies in Chile, including the questioning of traditional forms of investigation based on hegemonic rationalistic and scientific regimes of knowledge.

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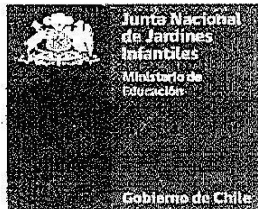


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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Official Agreement with JUNJI (Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles)



RESOLUCIÓN EXENTA N° 015/ 00413

**MAT:** APRUEBA PROTOCOLO DE ACUERDO ENTRE LA JUNTA NACIONAL DE JARDINES INFANTILES Y DOÑA NATALIA ANDREA TORRES CARREÑO.

SANTIAGO, 25 JUN 2015

VISTOS:

1°) lo dispuesto en la Ley N° 17.301, de 1970, del Ministerio de Educación Pública, que "Crea Corporación Denominada Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles"; 2°) el Decreto Supremo N° 1.574, de 1971, del Ministerio de Educación Pública, que "Aprueba Reglamento de la Ley N° 17.301, que Crea la Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles"; 3°) el Decreto Supremo N° 1.56, de 2014, del Ministerio de Educación, que nombra a doña Desirée López de Maturana Luna, como Vicepresidenta Ejecutiva de la Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles; 4°) la Ley N° 19.880, de 2003, del Ministerio Secretaría General de la Presidencia, que "Establece Bases de los Procedimientos Administrativos que Rigen los Actos de los Órganos de la Administración del Estado"; 5°) la Resolución N° 1.600, de 2008, de la Contraloría General de la República, que "Fija Normas Sobre Exención del Trámite de Toma de Razón".

CONSIDERANDO:

1°) La Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles es una corporación autónoma, con personalidad jurídica de derecho público, funcionalmente descentralizada, domiciliada en Santiago, que tendrá a su cargo crear y planificar, coordinar, promover y estimular la organización y funcionamiento de sus jardines infantiles y de aquellos a que se refiere el artículo 32 bis de la ley N° 20.835, de 2015, del Ministerio de Educación, que "Crea la Subsecretaría de Educación Parvularia, la Intendencia de Educación Parvularia y Modifica Diversos Cuerpos Legales."

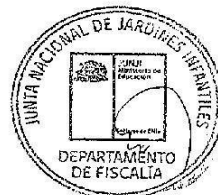
2°) Que, en el mes de mayo de 2015, se suscribió Protocolo de Acuerdo entre doña Desirée López de Maturana Luna, Vicepresidenta Ejecutiva de la Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles, y la señora Natalia Andrea Torres Carreño

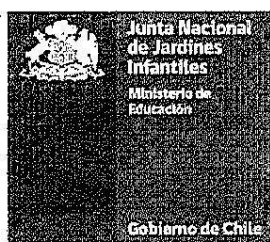
3°) Que, es necesario dictar el correspondiente acto administrativo aprobatorio de dicho Protocolo de Acuerdo.

RESUELVO

1°) APRUÉBASE Protocolo de Acuerdo suscrito entre doña Desirée López de Maturana Luna, Vicepresidenta Ejecutiva de la Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles, y la señora Natalia Andrea Torres Carreño, cuyo texto es el siguiente:

Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles (JUNJI)  
Mercedes Pereira 726, Providencia,  
Santiago, Chile Fono: (56-2) 28646000  
www.junji.cl





PROTOCOLO DE ACUERDO  
JUNTA NACIONAL DE JARDINES INFANTILES  
Y  
NATALIA ANDREA TORRES CARREÑO

En Santiago, a 26 de Mayo de 2015, la Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles, corporación autónoma, con personalidad jurídica de derecho público, RUT N°70.072.600-2, representada por su Vicepresidenta Ejecutiva, doña GLADYS DESIRES LOPEZ DE MATURANA LUNA, cédula de identidad N° 9.055.374-7, ambos domiciliados en Marchant Pereira N°726, comuna de Providencia, Santiago, en adelante la JUNJI, por una parte, y la otra doña NATALIA ANDREA TORRES CARREÑO, RUT N° 15.844.736-3, domiciliada en Carlos Alvarado 5296, comuna de Las Condes, Santiago, se ha convenido el siguiente protocolo de acuerdo:

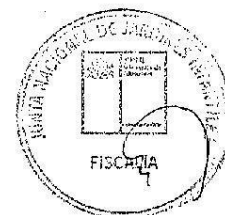
**PRIMERO:** La JUNJI es una institución del Estado de Chile creada por la Ley N° 17.301, que la definió como una corporación autónoma, con personalidad jurídica de derecho público, funcionalmente descentralizada y que tendrá a su cargo crear y planificar, coordinar, promover, estimular y supervisar la organización y funcionamiento de jardines infantiles.

Su misión consiste en otorgar educación parvularia pública de calidad y bienestar integral a niños y niñas preferentemente menores de cuatro años, priorizando en aquellos que provienen de familias que requieren mayores aportes del Estado tendiendo a la universalización, a través de diversos programas educativos con una perspectiva de territorialidad; desde una visión de sociedad inclusiva y de niños y niñas como sujetos de derechos; y que reconoce las potencialidades educativas de sus contextos familiares, sociales y culturales incorporándolas para dar mayor pertinencia a sus aprendizajes.

La investigadora señora NATALIA TORRES es Psicóloga de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, y Magíster en Psicología Educativa de esa misma casa de estudios, actualmente se encuentra realizando estudios de Doctorado en educación con la Universidad de Sheffield, Inglaterra. La investigadora se encuentra desarrollando su Tesis Doctoral, en alianza con el Centro de Investigación Avanzada en Educación de la Universidad de Chile (CIAE), para lo cual manifiesta su interés en articular el trabajo de terreno en jardines infantiles de JUNJI en la Región Metropolitana.

**SEGUNDO:** El objetivo de la investigación es: analizar las conceptualizaciones que se construyen respecto de Calidad y Equidad desde la perspectiva de los diferentes actores involucrados en el

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proceso de diseño, implementación y la recepción de la intervención, tales como diseñadores de políticas públicas, maestros, niños, niñas y padres.

El estudio propone analizar y reflexionar en el mismo contexto en que se ponen en práctica estos conceptos (jardines infantiles), así como también en relación a las estructuras sociales más amplias, a saber, la cultura y las relaciones que se establecen entre el sistema educativo y el sistema chileno en general. Adicionalmente, la Investigadora realizará un análisis dinámico, donde las voces de diferentes actores claves en Educación para la Primera Infancia (EPI) participen e influyan en el contexto en que estas políticas se diseñan e implementan, esto último a través de un estudio de caso con una perspectiva participativa, incluyendo las voces de todos los diferentes actores involucrados en el proceso educativo.

La investigación utilizará la estrategia de estudio de caso, con el fin de insertarse en un contexto particular, analizando sus interacciones en profundidad. Esto significa que se hará la selección de un jardín infantil (que cumpla con ciertas características determinadas por la investigadora), donde se realizará la totalidad del estudio. Al interior del jardín se selecciona una sala de clases del nivel Medio Mayor, correspondiente a niños y niñas entre 3 años y 3 años 11 meses. El estudio de caso incluirá la observación de actividades generales del jardín infantil tales como momentos recreativos, saludo inicial, interacciones entre educadoras y padres-apoderados, y también actividades específicas desarrolladas en la sala de clases. Del mismo modo, se incluirán como participantes del estudio a la directora del jardín infantil, la educadora perteneciente a la sala de clases seleccionada, niños y niñas pertenecientes a la sala de clases seleccionada, y padres-apoderados.

**TERCERO:** La Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles, en su condición de institución del Estado de Chile especializada en Educación Parvularia, comprende la relevancia del desarrollo de prácticas profesionales o investigaciones especialmente en la formación integral de los futuros profesionales y técnicos en distintas áreas y en especial en la de Educación Parvularia.

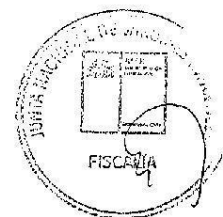
**CUARTO:** Que, en ese contexto, la JUNJI requiere que para que la investigadora pueda optar a la realización de las acciones referidas precedentemente en los jardines infantiles y/o dependencias de la Institución, se suscriba previamente un convenio con la JUNJI.

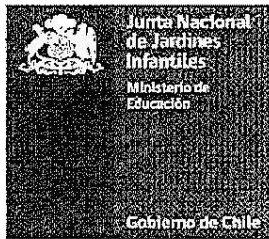
**QUINTO:** La investigadora debe ceñirse a las orientaciones definidas en el Referente Curricular Institucional y a los lineamientos que imparta su Departamento Técnico, especialmente en lo relacionado con el resguardo y protección de los p<sup>á</sup>vulos como sujetos de derecho.

**SEXTO:** Finalizada la investigación, la investigadora deberá remitir una copia de los resultados obtenidos al Departamento Técnico y a la Dirección regional respectiva además de un breve informe (resumen ejecutivo) donde se indiquen las fortalezas, debilidades, oportunidades de mejora y sugerencias derivadas de la investigación realizada, siempre resguardando la confidencialidad de los participantes.

**SÉPTIMO:** Las partes, están conscientes que una acción coordinada entre la institución y la investigadora contribuirá a la consecución de los objetivos que le son propios, razón por la cual mediante el presente protocolo se comprometen para aunar sus esfuerzos con la finalidad de materializar la extensión del presente convenio, los que para efectos operativos serán suscritos entre la investigadora y la vicepresidenta ejecutiva.

Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles-JUNJI  
Merchant Pareiro 726, Providencia,  
Santiago, Chile Fono: (56-2) 26545000  
www.junji.cl





**OCTAVO:** La Junta Nacional de Jardines infantiles, no será responsable por los accidentes o lesiones de cualquier clase que sufra la/el estudiante, durante su estadía o en el trayecto al lugar donde realizará su investigación.

**NOVENO:** Son obligaciones de la investigadora las siguientes:

Toda publicación que realice debe ser sin fines de lucro, en revistas u otros de carácter especializado, sin perjuicio de que los resultados de su investigación eventualmente puedan contribuir a la formación de políticas públicas o a la mejora de los diversos programas de educación parvularia en Chile.

Mantener la confidencialidad de la información y/o datos entregados, a los que tenga acceso a partir de su proceso de observación participante en el jardín infantil seleccionado. Al respecto, declara estar de acuerdo con lo siguiente:

- a. Se obliga a que toda información que la Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles le haya proporcionado tendrá el carácter de confidencial, cualquiera sea la forma o formato a través del cual se exprese dicha información.
- b. Utilizar la información confidencial con el fin de alcanzar los objetivos indicados en el presente instrumento y no divulgar, publicar, ni permitir la publicación de todo o parte de la información confidencial.
- c. En el evento que por orden judicial o de cualquier otra autoridad competente, la investigadora se viere obligada a divulgar todo o parte de la información confidencial, deberá notificar previamente y de inmediato de esta circunstancia a Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles.

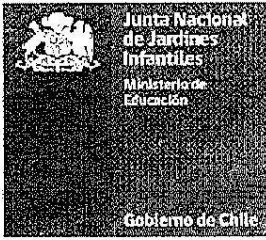
**DECIMO:** La investigadora se compromete a facilitar a la Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles, el acceso de manera gratuita a los resultados de la investigación, en dos copias.

**DECIMO PRIMERO:** Para todos los efectos legales derivados del presente contrato, las partes fijan su domicilio en la ciudad de Santiago de Chile, y se someten a la competencia de sus Tribunales de Justicia.

**DECIMO SEGUNDO:** Se deja expresa constancia que el presente acuerdo produce una relación de carácter exclusivamente académica, por lo que la investigadora no percibirá remuneración alguna por parte de la Junta nacional de jardines Infantiles.

Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles JUNJI  
Marchant Peralta 726, Providencia.  
Santiago, Chile Fono: (56-2) 28645000  
www.junji.cl





DECIMO TERCERO: El presente protocolo de acuerdo, se firma en dos ejemplares, quedando uno en poder de cada parte.

Previa lectura, las partes ratifican y firman:

  
DESIRÉE LOPEZ DE MATURANA LUNA  
VICEPRESIDENTA EJECUTIVA  
EJECUTIVA  
JUNTA NACIONAL DE JARDINES INFANTILES

  
NATALIA TORRES CARREÑO  
INVESTIGADORA

2º) INCORPÓRESE al presente acto administrativo, Protocolo de Acuerdo suscrito entre doña Natalia Andrea Torres Carreño y doña Desirée López de Maturana Luna, Vicepresidenta Ejecutiva de la Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles.

  
DESIRÉE LÓPEZ DE MATURANA L.  
VICEPRESIDENTA EJECUTIVA  
JUNTA NACIONAL DE JARDINES INFANTILES

DLdeML/LRM/RAJS/PSV/lee  
Distribución:  
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- Departamento Técnico Pedagógico.  
- Oficina de Partes.  
- Ingreso: 449 (2)-2015





## Appendix 2: Agreement Between CIAE and Natalia Torres

DATED \_\_\_\_\_ 2014

(1) THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

- and -

(2) THE UNIVERSITY OF CHILE

- and -

(3) NATALIA TORRES

VISITING STUDENT  
AGREEMENT

THIS VISITING STUDENT AGREEMENT is made on

2014

BETWEEN

- (1) **THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**, incorporated by Royal Charter (company number RC000667) whose address is Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN ("**SHEFFIELD**");
- (2) **THE UNIVERSITY OF CHILE** incorporated by Royal Charter (company number □) whose address is at Av. Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins 1058, Santiago, Chile ("**CHILE**"); and
- (3) **Natalia Torres** a PhD student registered at SHEFFIELD ("**STUDENT**")

Each a Party, together the Parties

1. CHILE is carrying out work relating to research in early childhood education in relation to teacher training, learning and development and young children's perspectives regarding their experience in early childhood education settings. The STUDENT will visit CHILE from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014 until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015 ("**Term**") to undertake "research into a particular Chilean preschool, to analyse how early childhood education is implemented in Chile and what are the concepts involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of early childhood education policies in Chile" ("**Work**").
2. The STUDENT will be supervised during their visit by Daniela Jadue ("**Supervisor**"), employed by CHILE. The STUDENT and Supervisor will meet at least six (6) times during the Term to discuss progress and provide information. The Supervisor will also review documents provided by the STUDENT and provide support on literature reviews related to the Work and provide the STUDENT with academic direction for the Work.
3. In the event that the Supervisor becomes unable or unwilling to supervise the STUDENT then CHILE shall use reasonable endeavours to nominate a successor to be approved in writing by SHEFFIELD (such approval not to be unreasonably withheld or delayed). In the event that the parties cannot agree a mutually acceptable successor then any Party may terminate this Agreement.
4. In the event that the STUDENT becomes unable or unwilling to continue with the Work then any Party may terminate this Agreement.
5. During the Term, CHILE shall promptly inform supervisor Ansgar Allen at SHEFFIELD of any issues regarding the progress or conduct of the STUDENT.
6. CHILE agrees to provide the STUDENT with office space in suitable premises for the TERM.
7. On completion of the Work, the STUDENT will provide CHILE with a report of their experiences and a summary of the knowledge acquired through the Work.
8. To enable the STUDENT to undertake the Work CHILE may disclose to the STUDENT information and associated documentation which is the secret and confidential information of

CHILE ("**Confidential Information**"). For the purposes of this Agreement "Confidential Information" means information of a confidential nature or which shall be designated as confidential by CHILE from time to time and in any form or format whether oral, written, magnetic, electronic, graphic or digitised (and including any samples, designs, models, drawings, research, instructions and any combination or compilation thereof) and shall in particular include business information, technical know-how, inventions (whether or not patentable or patented), proprietary software, practical experience, methodologies, data (including technical and scientific data), business organisations, formulae, specifications, pricing, structures, manufacturing information, works of authorship or creative works and ideas which are owned, developed or acquired by CHILE..

9. In consideration of CHILE disclosing to the STUDENT the Confidential Information, the STUDENT agrees to keep it, and all information relating to it and its use, secret and confidential and not to use it for any purpose other than the Work, and, except with the express prior consent in writing of CHILE, not to disclose it to any third party and not to make copies of any records of Confidential Information. The STUDENT shall not reverse-engineer, decompile, disassemble, deconstruct or modify any Confidential Information or records containing Confidential Information without CHILE's written permission.
  10. CHILE does not warrant nor undertake that the Confidential Information disclosed hereunder is accurate or complete.
  11. The STUDENT shall immediately inform CHILE if he/she becomes aware of the possession, use or knowledge of any of CHILE's Confidential Information by any person not authorised to possess, use or have knowledge of the Confidential Information.
  12. In the event that the STUDENT requires the assistance of any party other than employees of CHILE or third parties who are directly concerned with the evaluation of the Work, to whom disclosure of any of CHILE's Confidential Information is necessary, the STUDENT shall first seek CHILE's approval of such third party and thereafter obtain from that third party enforceable undertakings at least as binding upon that third party as the STUDENT is bound to CHILE hereunder which terms are to be agreed with CHILE and on the express basis that CHILE shall be entitled to enforce such undertakings pursuant to the provisions of the Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999.
  13. The restrictions above shall not apply to information which can be proved by the STUDENT upon the written request of CHILE:
    - 13.1 was already in the STUDENT's possession or independently developed by the STUDENT and at his/her's free disposal prior to CHILE's disclosure of it to the STUDENT;
    - 13.2 was disclosed to the STUDENT by a third party at liberty to disclose that information and without breach of the terms of this agreement; or
    - 13.3 is or comes into the public domain through no act or default of the STUDENT.
  14. Confidential Information may be disclosed to the extent that such disclosure is required by law, in which case the STUDENT will notify CHILE of such requirement as early as possible before such disclosure, and shall provide CHILE with full details of the requirement and of the Confidential Information that is proposed to be disclosed.
-

15. The STUDENT shall return to SHEFFIELD all documents, records, and materials in his/her possession, custody or control incorporating any Confidential Information (except for one single copy of the Confidential Information which may be retained for audit purposes):
    - 15.1 (except as otherwise agreed in writing) forthwith upon conclusion of the Work; or
    - 15.2 forthwith at any time upon request by SHEFFIELD.
  16. These obligations of confidentiality shall remain in force for ten (10) years notwithstanding earlier termination of this agreement for any reason.
  17. CHILE recognises that the STUDENT may make reference to or publish information concerning the Work, in the interests of the exchange of scientific information, in journals, theses, dissertations or other such published material. Before such publication, SHEFFIELD shall notify CHILE with a copy of any proposed publication. Should CHILE believe that publication should be delayed in order to enable any intellectual property rights arising from the information to be registered then it shall notify SHEFFIELD within thirty (30) days of the date of SHEFFIELD's notification and SHEFFIELD will refrain from publication in order to enable such rights to be registered. Such registration will be undertaken by CHILE expeditiously and CHILE will notify SHEFFIELD when registration has been filed, and in any event SHEFFIELD may publish such publication after six (6) months from the date of SHEFFIELD's notification.
  18. SHEFFIELD shall own all copyrights arising out of any materials first produced in the performance of the Work. SHEFFIELD shall grant to CHILE, where it is free to do so, an irrevocable, royalty-free, non-exclusive licence to reproduce, translate and use all copyrighted material for its own purpose.
  19. CHILE acknowledges that nothing in this Agreement shall prevent the STUDENT from publishing a thesis, undergoing a viva with examiners or placing a thesis in SHEFFIELD's library provided that before such publication, the other parties shall be notified with a copy of any proposed publication. Should CHILE believe that publication should be delayed in order to enable any intellectual property rights arising from the information to be registered then it shall notify SHEFFIELD within thirty (30) days of the date of the notification and the STUDENT will refrain from publication in order to enable such rights to be registered but for the avoidance of doubt nothing shall prevent or delay the STUDENT from undertaking any examination (which shall if required be undertaken in confidence) or placing his/her thesis in SHEFFIELD's library (under restricted access if necessary). Such registration will be undertaken by CHILE expeditiously and it will notify SHEFFIELD when registration has been filed, and in any event the Student may publish such publication after six (6) months from the date of the first notification of the proposed publication.
  20. SHEFFIELD shall procure that the STUDENT complies with his/her obligations under this agreement.
  21. Any Party may terminate this Agreement by providing the other Parties with thirty (30) days prior written notice of the termination.
  22. This agreement shall be read and construed in accordance with English law and the STUDENT hereby submits to the exclusive jurisdiction of the English Courts.
  23. This Agreement may be executed in any number of counterparts, each of which when executed (and delivered or transmitted by electronic means), will constitute one original, and photocopy, electronic or other copies shall have the same effect for all purposes as an ink-
-

signed original. Each Party hereto consents to be bound by photocopy signatures of such Party's representative hereto. No counterpart will be effective until each Party has executed at least one counterpart.

IN WITNESS whereof the parties have executed this Agreement the day and year first above written.

**SIGNED** by  
for and on behalf of The University of  
Sheffield:

Name:

Title:

Date:

**SIGNED** by The University  
of Chile  
for and on behalf of

Name: *Rafael Correa*

Title: *Director*

Date: *September 15<sup>th</sup> 2014*

**SIGNED** by  
for and on behalf of Natalia Torres:

Name: *NATALIA TORRES CARREÑO*

Title: *PhD STUDENT*

Date: *September 26, 2014*

## Appendix 3: Ethical Approval from The University of Sheffield



# Application 002873

### Section A: Applicant details

Created:

Tue 10 February 2015 at 21:14

First name:

Natalia

Last name:

Torres Carreno

Email:

natorres1@sheffield.ac.uk

Programme name:

PhD in education

Module name:

PhD in education

Last updated:

05/03/2015

Department:

School of Education

Date application started:

Tue 10 February 2015 at 21:14

Applying as:

Postgraduate research

Research project title:

PhD The Concepts of Quality and Equity in Early Childhood Education in Chile: Reproduction and Resistance of Policy by Key Actors

### Section B: Basic information

#### 1. Supervisor(s)

**Name**

**Email**

Ansgar Allen

a.allen@sheffield.ac.uk

## 2: Proposed project duration

Proposed start date:

Sun 1 March 2015

Proposed end date:

Thu 1 October 2015

## 3: URMS number (where applicable)

URMS number

- not entered -

## 4: Suitability

Takes place outside UK?

Yes

Involves NHS?

No

Healthcare research?

No

ESRC funded?

No

Involves adults who lack the capacity to consent?

No

Led by another UK institution?

No

Involves human tissue?

No

Clinical trial?

No

Social care research?

No

## 5: Vulnerabilities

Involves potentially vulnerable participants?

Yes

Involves potentially highly sensitive topics?

No

## Section C: Summary of research

### 1. Aims & Objectives

Since the 1990s, educational reforms have been in the centre of social interventions in Chile, and the two core concepts used have been quality and equity. Specifically, Early Childhood Education has been of great interest for researchers and policy makers, however, a more comprehensive analysis of the concepts embedded in the design of ECE interventions and policies is needed, especially relating to the concepts of quality and equity, and how different definitions of these concepts can affect the way in which public policies are designed, implemented and evaluated. Although early childhood education policies have the explicit purpose of promoting integral development of children and the fulfilment of learning outcomes, recent research has shown that these objectives are not being achieved. In addition, there has been little focus on a more critical analysis of the way that policies are being designed in the first place, and if the definitions of quality and equity influence them.

For this reason, this research aims to describe the definitions different key actors involved in early childhood education have regarding the concepts of quality and equity, how they relate to each other, and how this relation influences the way early childhood education policies are designed, implemented and evaluated. Specifically, this stage of my research aims to comprehend the definitions key actors involved in an early childhood education centre have, regarding the concepts of Quality and Equity, and how these definitions influence the process of designing, implementing and evaluating early childhood education policies in Chile.

Its main objectives are as follows:

• Describe the conceptualisations that key actors involved in early childhood education in a preschool centre in Chile (head teacher, practitioners, assistants, parents and children) have regarding Quality and Equity.

• Analyse the commonalities and tensions present between the different conceptualisations key actors involved in early childhood education in a preschool centre have about Quality and Equity in early childhood education in Chile.

• Analyse how these commonalities and tensions influence the design, implementation and evaluation of early childhood education policies in Chile.

### 2. Methodology

In order to fulfil the purposes of this research, I will be conducting a case study in a preschool institution in Chile, specifically in the city of Santiago, in which the case to be studied will correspond to a classroom of children between the ages of 3 years and 3 years 11 months (called Middle Major, Medio Mayor in Spanish). The preschool selected is part of a set of preschools administered by JUNJI, one of the two public institutions in charge of the provision of early childhood education in Chile, for children who are part of the 60% of most vulnerable and/or in poverty families.

In this particular setting, I aspire to develop a series of activities with practitioners, teaching assistants, children, the head teacher of the preschool, and the parents of the children, following a gradual approach that will allow me to develop a trust relationship and engage them in a collaborative process of investigation. Thus, I will firstly engage myself in typical routine activities inside the preschool in order to get to know the setting, and adapt the activities to that particular context. Additionally, a series of activities have been designed to answer the research questions mentioned previously. Nevertheless, as this research has been designed from a qualitative approach, these activities could be modified, adapting them to the context in which they will be used, considering the particular setting of the study and the response of the participants to each



of the activities. Similarly, new activities could be incorporated for the same reason.

**Video recordings of classroom activities:** I will conduct video recordings that will include participation of each child selected in their daily routines, and group activities with the rest of their classmates. They will also include interactions between the children and adults (practitioners and teaching assistants), and practitioners and teaching assistants. The activities to be recorded will be discussed beforehand with the practitioner, teaching assistants and children, and the use of the camera will be adapted according to the consent of the participants. In case one or more of the participants does not wish to be recorded a one particular time, the activity will be adapted so they are not visible in the shot. If this is not possible, the activity will be rescheduled to fit the wishes of the participants.

**Researcher's Journal:** this tool will include my perceptions and experiences regarding the activities recorded on video to enrich the analysis process, and also field notes regarding other activities developed in the preschool centre. In addition, it will include notes on informal discussions with the participants of the study, formal interviews with them, as well as reflections on the research process. The journal will be completed during the fieldwork in order to incorporate immediate perceptions and feelings regarding the research process, and it will also include reflections following the fieldwork that will complement the previous notes. It will be completed each day of the fieldwork, and also during the analysis process through the revision of videos, transcriptions and other sources of information.

**In-depth Interviews:** the interviews will be carried out during the case study, and will include the head teacher of the preschool centre, the practitioner of the classroom, teaching assistant(s) of the classroom, and parents of the children selected for the specific activities (described in the section on participants in this form). The interviews will be semi-structured, and will include broad topics to be addressed with the participants, in order to enable them to engage in a dynamic dialogue with the interviewer, not restricting the way in which they conceptualise Quality and Equity. Moreover, the interview will include areas such as education in general, ECE in Chile, and the role the participants attribute to ECE.

**Book Making:** the book making is an activity designed to incorporate children's perspectives into the analysis, positioning them as active participants of the study. The activity consists in, firstly, inviting the children to take pictures of their preschool centre, guided by a series of open questions that will seek to engage children in a discussion about their centre, and how they perceive and value it. Secondly, with the previous authorization of the practitioner and teaching assistant(s) of the classroom, I will conduct an activity with the participant children in which they will make drawings about their preschool centre, also guided by open questions such as, What do you like most about your preschool?, What do you like to do most in your classroom?, What activity would you like to include to make your classroom better? Lastly, a final activity will take place, with the previous authorization of the practitioner and teaching assistant(s), in which the children will make a book including the pictures and drawings made by them, summarising their perceptions about their preschool, and their experiences.

As this activity will take a considerable amount of time of the day, I will previously discuss the activity with the practitioner and the teaching assistant(s), and adapt the activity so that it does not disrupt the setting. In this sense, it is important first to evaluate the appropriateness of the activity in this particular setting, re-constructing the activity alongside the teacher and teaching assistants in order to design an activity that enriches the work in the classroom rather than disrupts it.

Similarly, I will conduct the activity once I have built a trust relation between the participants, so that it is possible to develop a dynamic dialogue with the children, incorporating them not only in the activity itself but also in its design, and the objectives that seeks. Also, I will take into account the activities that are regularly being done in the preschool centre, and how this particular activity can be adapted to the context where is being implemented.

**Collaborative discussions:** this activity will be conducted at the end of the fieldwork, and it will aim to incorporate all of the participants in a discussion of what conceptualisations of Quality and

Equity they have, how they relate to each other, and how they influence the way early childhood education policies are designed and implemented. This space will sought to engage participants not only in the process of gathering information but also in the analysis process.

It is important to mention that all of the activities will be conducted in Spanish (native language in Chile), and the analysis process will include transcriptions in such language, in order to maintain detailed information as accurate as possible. The analysis of each activity will be conducted through a process of codification based on content analysis, recognizing specific categories and concepts that answer the research questions, and how they interact with each other and with the broader social context of early childhood education in Chile.

### 3. Personal Safety

Raises personal safety issues? No

Personal safety management

- *not entered* -

## Section D: About the participants

### 1. Potential Participants

I will include as participants of the study, key actors involved in the daily activities of the classroom selected.

- The head-teacher of the early childhood education centre
- The practitioner from the classroom selected as the case
- The teaching assistant(s) of the classroom selected as the case
- The children attending the classroom, and specifically a group of children (between 4 and 8) who will be invited to participate in the activities described previously (nevertheless, the final number of children to participate will be discussed with the teacher and teaching assistants, taking into account their perspectives)
- Parents of the children invited to participate in the activities planned

As my research involves the participation of children who are considered a vulnerable group, it is important to address the importance of including them in this study. During the past years, special attention has been given to doing research incorporating the voices and experiences of children, not only from observation or the perceptions adults have of them, but also as active members of society, having ideas and beliefs about the world they live in, and thus, contributing to the transformation of their context (Corsaro, 2005; Mayall, 2002). Drawing from this perspective, it is possible then to study the interactions between children and parents, children and teachers, and ultimately, children and the broader society, including their voices and perceptions about different social processes, and in this case, their education, understanding that they can actively contribute to the development of such processes.

Children, as any other social group, are both constrained by the social structure as well as producing it through social practices. Concepts like "Interpretive Reproduction"™ (Described by William Corsaro, a sociologist specialized in early childhood research) or "Agency"™ (used widely by sociologists of childhood) point to the fact that children act to transform their contexts and shape their subjectivities and can in some cases also contribute to the reproduction of their powerlessness as minority social group through their actions (James & James, 2008; Nutbrown &

Clough, 2009). Children exercise their agency by understanding the rules of the culture in which they are immersed, being influenced by their knowledge about it, their interaction with others and their behaviours (Wood, 2014).

Methods including children's voices have been widely developed within this perspective (Christensen & James, 2000; Fisher & Wood, 2012; Mayall, 2002; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009), relying on more imaginative tools that allow children to actively participate in investigation (O'Kane, 2000). Among these techniques, the Mosaic Approach, drawing on research done in Preschools from Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy, develops a series of strategies and tools to listen to children that acknowledge them as active constructors of meaning, including different ways of gathering information that don't rely solely on the spoken word (i.e. photographs, drawings, videos, among other techniques) (Clark & Moss, 2011). I will draw on methods such as the Mosaic Approach, to include different gathering tools, intending to incorporate key actors involved in ECE in Chile in the process of reflecting about their everyday life experiences in a preschool institution (Clark, 2005; Clark & Moss, 2011).

In the specific context of Chile, there is recent interest in incorporating the voices of children into the discussion of early childhood education and its importance. Thus, the use of new methodologies to include their perspectives is relevant as it shows a method for working with young children not only in academic research, but also in teaching practice.

## 2. Recruiting Potential Participants

For the recruiting procedure, I will, in first place, contact the people in charge of authorising research projects inside the institution mentioned (JUNJI). After this first approach, I will begin the process of authorisation which consists on presenting a summary of the research to be done, along with detailed explanation of the activities, a timetable, and a description of the ethical issues to be addressed. Additionally, I will be working with the support of a Chilean study centre called CIAE, within the University of Chile, establishing a professional relationship between JUNJI, CIAE and myself, which will guard the entire process, securing ethical issues regarding the work with children, parents and professionals inside the preschool centre. In terms of the documents to be delivered both to JUNJI and to the Preschool selected, JUNJI has a special procedure of authorisation, thus, the documents will be filled according to their guidelines.

In addition, I will provide the institution with an information sheet which will include the main objectives of the research, that is, understanding the definitions key actors have regarding the concepts of quality and equity in early childhood education, what are the tensions and commonalities between the different definitions, and how these influence the way policies are designed, implemented and evaluated. I will also include information regarding the ethical approval procedure obtained to ensure participants of the appropriateness of the research project design, and all the contact information necessary in case of any doubt from the participants, including information of the institutions that will support my work. Similarly, I will also provide each participant with an information sheet, and schedule a special meeting with the parents of the participant children to explain in detail the activities to be developed during the fieldwork. Lastly, I will also explain the children the purpose of my investigation, and allow them to ask me questions regarding the activities and the research process, in order to include them in every step of the fieldwork. I will explain the main objective of the study, and how their participation is related to the objectives, contextualizing the investigation to their everyday activities.

### 2.1 Advertising methods

Will the study be advertised using the volunteer lists for staff or students maintained by CiCS? -

*not entered -*

*- not entered -*

### **3. Consent**

Will informed consent be obtained from the participants? (i.e. the proposed process) Yes

Informed consent will be sought when contacting the participants, explaining first how they will take part in the research project (by giving them a detailed information sheet) If they agree, a written consent form will be given to them, which will be signed by both the participant and the researcher. A copy of the consent form will be given to the participant. In the case of children, written assent will be sought at the beginning of the study, explaining first to the children the main objectives and their role in the research process. Also, parents of the children will be asked to authorise their child to participate through an informed consent. Additionally, assent will be sought for at the beginning of each activity, through a form that will be adapted to their age (attached in this application).

### **4. Payment**

Will financial/in kind payments be offered to participants? No

*- not entered -*

### **5. Potential Harm to Participants**

What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to the participants?

There is little chance of potential physical and psychological harm or distress for the participants. Regardless, in order to ensure the safety and well-being of each participant, a consent form will be delivered to them with all of the information necessary to fully understand the research and their participation in it. Likewise, it will be ensured that each participant feels free to leave the study at any point.

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate protection and well-being of the participants?

In the case of the head teacher of the preschool selected, the consent form will only include authorisation to do an interview and to participate in the collaborative discussions, as the general authorisation to work in the preschool and classroom selected will be completed through the procedure developed by JUNJI (explained previously on this form). As for the practitioner and the teaching assistant(s) of the classroom, the consent form will include authorisation to do an interview, to participate in the collaborative discussions, and to observe and record activities inside the classroom including their interactions with the children and with each other.

As for the parents, there will be two separate consent forms, one in which authorisation will be asked to do an interview and to participate in the collaborative discussions, and another consent form in which they will be asked to authorise their children to participate in the activities selected. Lastly, as this research includes the voices of children as active participants, it is important not only to seek for parents' consent, but also to seek for children's assent, that is, allowing them to exercise control in deciding whether they wish to participate in the study or not (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Thus, they will be also asked if they wish to participate in the activities, both at the beginning of the fieldwork through a conversation with them that will include the purposes of the research, the assurance that their participation is voluntary. Similarly, before each of the activities, assent will be sought for again, through a series of sheets showing different emotions, in order to allow children to inform the researcher how do they feel about participating in that

particular activity, respecting their decision every step of the process.

## Section E: About the data

### 1. Data Confidentiality Measures

All of the information and data collected from all of the activities aforementioned will be properly stored and will be available only for the research team. If the participant wishes to maintain his/her anonymity, they will be asked before they sign the consent form. If anonymity is requested, names will be encrypted to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and the analysis will not include identification of any sort (i.e. for citing and quotation). All of this will be described in the consent form and information sheet, to inform the participants of the procedure (attached in this application).

Video and audio recordings will be stored during the research study and kept safe.

Two years after the research is over (in case any other publications are developed after the research process), video recordings and transcripts will be destroyed to ensure confidentiality. In addition, as it is the aim of this research to engage participants in a collaborative discussion, confidentiality will be ensured in terms of the information gathered during the fieldwork (for instance, in individual interviews), and the group sessions will address broad topics that allow participants to discuss around those issues, and describe their perceptions and opinions in a trusted space.

### 2. Data Storage

Only the researcher will have access and control of the data generated in the project. The analysis will take place in the facilities of the University of Sheffield and University of Chile (through an official agreement established between both universities), and the researcher will be in charge of the analysis process.

Encryption will be used at all times to ensure anonymity if the participants demand it, and only the researcher will have access to the primary data obtained in the research.

The information will be recorded through audio and video media, and it will be explained in detail to the participants in the consent form and information sheet. It will be described in the consent form that only the researcher will be allowed to use the data for future research projects, publications, conferences, presentations, and other academic outputs.

## Section F: Supporting documentation

### Information & Consent

Participant information sheets relevant to project?

Yes

### Participant Information Sheets

- [information\\_sheet\\_NT\\_Head\\_Teacher.docx](#)  
(Document 006055)

- [information\\_sheet\\_NT\\_Practitioner.docx](#)  
(Document 006056)
- [information\\_sheet\\_NT\\_Teaching\\_Assistants.docx](#)  
(Document 006057)
- [information\\_sheet\\_parents-children.docx](#)  
(Document 006058)

Consent forms relevant to project?

Yes

#### Consent Forms

- [Consent\\_Form\\_NT\\_head\\_teacher\\_\\_practitioner\\_\\_teaching\\_assistants\\_.doc](#)  
(Document 005227)
- [Consent\\_Form\\_NT\\_parents-children.doc](#)  
(Document 006059)
- [CONSENT\\_FORM\\_FOR\\_CHILDREN.docx](#)  
(Document 006060)

#### Additional Documentation

None

#### External Documentation

- not entered -

#### Official notes

- not entered -

#### Section G: Declaration

Signed by:  
Natalia Torres  
Date signed:  
Wed 4 March 2015 at 15:57



## **Appendix 4: Information Sheet for Stakeholders (In Spanish)**

### **Hoja de Información**

***"El concepto de Calidad en Educación de la Primera Infancia en Chile: reproducción y resistencia de las políticas por parte de actores clave"***

#### **1. Invitación**

Usted está siendo invitado a participar en un proyecto de investigación. Antes de decidir, es importante que usted entienda los objetivos de la investigación y cuáles son las actividades que incluye. Por favor tome tiempo para leer la información descrita en este documento y discutir con otros si lo desea. Por favor, siéntase libre de preguntar al equipo de investigación si hay algo que no está claro o si necesita más información, y tomar el tiempo que necesite para decidir si desea o no participar. Muchas gracias por leer esto.

Esta investigación está siendo llevada a cabo por la señorita Natalia Torres, estudiante de doctorado de la Universidad de Sheffield, con el apoyo del CIAE (Centro de Investigación Avanzada en Educación) de la Universidad de Chile.

#### **2. ¿Cuál es el propósito de este proyecto?**

La educación de la primera infancia ha estado en el centro de las reformas educativas en los últimos años en Chile, y su relevancia ha sido apoyado por la evidencia internacional, afirmando que una educación de calidad en la primera infancia puede tener impacto en el desarrollo integral de los niños. Por esta razón, es importante entender cómo las políticas se están diseñando en Chile, cuáles son los conceptos que se utilizan para el diseño de ellos, y qué entiende por calidad y equidad en la educación de la primera infancia. Por lo tanto, el objetivo principal de esta investigación es entender cuáles son las definiciones que los diferentes actores clave involucrados en la educación de la primera infancia, tienen con respecto a los conceptos de calidad y equidad, y cómo estas definiciones influyen en el proceso de diseño, implementación y evaluación de las políticas.

#### **3. ¿Por qué he sido elegido?**

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo incluir participantes en los diferentes niveles de educación de la primera infancia en Chile. Por esta razón, los actores clave involucrados en el diseño de las políticas de educación de la primera infancia dentro de diversas instituciones del Estado han sido elegidos como participantes potenciales, y usted ha sido seleccionado como uno de ellos.

#### **4. ¿Tengo que participar?**

Su participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria, y depende de usted decidir si debe o no tomar parte. Si usted decide participar, se le dará esta hoja de información para mantener (y se le pedirá que firme un formulario de consentimiento). Sin embargo, usted se puede retirar de la investigación en

cualquier momento sin que le afecte en modo alguno. Usted no tiene que dar una razón para retirarse.

#### **5. ¿Qué tengo que hacer?**

Si usted decide participar, tendrá que firmar un formulario de consentimiento en el que usted está de acuerdo en participar de una entrevista, y en la que me deja saber su fecha, hora y lugar preferido, con el fin de coordinar la misma. Esta entrevista tendrá una duración de aproximadamente 30 a 45 minutos, y debe llevarse a cabo entre los meses de noviembre y diciembre de 2014, en el momento y lugar a decidir.

Durante la entrevista vamos a hablar de varios temas relacionados con la educación de la primera infancia y las políticas diseñadas en Chile, y cómo estas políticas se están diseñando e implementando.

#### **6. ¿Se me grabará, y cómo se utilizarán los medios de comunicación grabados?**

Voy a hacer una grabación de audio y tomar notas durante la entrevista, con el fin de analizar la información de manera precisa. La grabación será transcrita y todas las referencias personales se eliminarán si lo desea. Nadie fuera del equipo del proyecto podrá acceder a las grabaciones originales, las cuales se mantendrán a salvo en todo momento.

#### **7. ¿Cuáles son los posibles beneficios de participar?**

Si bien no hay beneficios inmediatos para las personas que participan en el proyecto, se espera que esta investigación aporte a quienes diseñan políticas de primera infancia, en la comprensión de cómo las políticas de la primera infancia la educación están siendo diseñadas, implementadas y evaluadas, y por lo tanto, ser capaz de mejorarlos y contribuir para el desarrollo integral de la educación de los niños y niñas en Chile.

#### **8. ¿Cuáles son las posibles desventajas y riesgos de tomar parte?**

Si bien no hay desventajas o riesgos de participar en esta investigación, si en algún momento de la entrevista se siente incómodo o desea detenerla, usted es libre de hacerlo sin dar ninguna razón.

#### **9. ¿Mi participación en este proyecto se mantendrá confidencial?**

Toda la información se almacenará y sólo será utilizada por el equipo de investigación, con fines de investigación. Si usted lo solicita, la información que se recolecte se mantendrá estrictamente confidencial y no será identificada o identificable en todos los informes o publicaciones; las grabaciones de audio se transcribirán y todas las referencias a datos personales serán removidos; y el investigador utilizará las transcripciones anónimas, no las grabaciones de voz reales.



## **10. ¿Qué pasará con los resultados del proyecto de investigación?**

Los resultados de este proyecto de investigación formarán parte de una tesis de doctorado. Algunos de los datos podrán ser utilizados para artículos de revistas o presentaciones en conferencias. Todos los resultados que se hagan públicos serán anónimos si así lo solicita, mediante la eliminación de cualquier información que pueda identificarle.

## **11. ¿Quién está organizando y financiando la investigación?**

La investigación es parte de un proyecto de investigación para obtener un doctorado en Educación y se financia a través del Programa de Capital Humano Avanzado (Becas Chile) de Conicyt (Comisión Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología de Chile).

## **12. ¿Quién ha revisado éticamente el proyecto?**

El comité de ética de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Sheffield ha revisado y aprobado este proyecto.

## **13. Contacto para más información**

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta con respecto al proyecto de investigación y su participación, puede ponerse en contacto conmigo, Natalia Torres, en:

Teléfono celular: +56 9 58584002

Correo electrónico: natorres1@sheffield.ac.uk

## **14. ¿Qué pasa si algo sale mal?**

Si el proyecto de investigación finaliza antes de la fecha prevista, se le notificará de ello por correo electrónico, junto con las razones de la interrupción del proyecto.

Si por alguna razón, usted necesita plantear una queja sobre cualquier parte del procedimiento adoptado por el equipo de investigación, incluyendo el tratamiento que el investigador le dio durante la entrevista, puede ponerse en contacto con :

Supervisor del proyecto de investigación: Ansgar Allen

Correo electrónico: a.allen@sheffield.ac.uk

Si usted siente que su queja no ha sido manejada a su satisfacción, usted puede ponerse en contacto con la Universidad de Sheffield en la oficina de "Registros y Secretaría".

**Muchas gracias por considerar este proyecto de investigación**

## **Appendix 5: Information Sheet for Parents (In Spanish)**

### **Hoja de Información**

#### ***"El concepto de Calidad en Educación de la Primera Infancia en Chile: reproducción y resistencia de las políticas por parte de actores clave"***

##### **1. Invitación**

Usted y su hijo(a) están siendo invitado a participar en un proyecto de investigación. Antes de decidir su participación y la de su hijo(a), es importante que usted entienda los objetivos de la investigación y cuáles son las actividades que incluye. Por favor tome tiempo para leer la información descrita en este documento y discutir con otros, si lo desea. Por favor, siéntase libre de preguntar al equipo de investigación si hay algo que no está claro o si necesita más información, y tomar el tiempo que necesite para decidir si desea o no participar. Muchas gracias por leer esto.

Esta investigación está siendo llevada a cabo por la señorita Natalia Torres, estudiante de doctorado de la Universidad de Sheffield, con el apoyo del CIAE (Centro de Investigación Avanzada en Educación) de la Universidad de Chile.

##### **2. ¿Cuál es el propósito de este proyecto?**

La educación de la primera infancia ha estado en el centro de las reformas educativas en los últimos años en Chile, y su relevancia ha sido apoyado por la evidencia internacional, afirmando que una educación de calidad en la primera infancia puede tener impacto en el desarrollo integral de los niños. Por esta razón, es importante entender cómo las políticas se están diseñando en Chile, cuáles son los conceptos que se utilizan para el diseño de ellos, y qué entiende por calidad y equidad en la educación de la primera infancia. Por lo tanto, el objetivo principal de esta investigación es entender cuáles son las definiciones que los diferentes actores clave involucrados en la educación de la primera infancia, tienen con respecto a los conceptos de calidad y equidad, y cómo estas definiciones influyen en el proceso de diseño, implementación y evaluación de las políticas.

##### **3. ¿Por qué he sido elegido?**

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo incluir participantes en los diferentes niveles de educación de la primera infancia en Chile. Por esta razón, niños y niñas que asisten a educación parvularia, así como sus padres y apoderados son considerados actores claves puesto que participan activamente y poseen información valiosa respecto a este nivel educativo.

##### **4. ¿Yo y/o mi hijo(a) tenemos que participar?**

Su participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria, y depende de usted decidir si debe o no tomar parte. Si usted decide participar, se le dará esta hoja de información para mantener (y se le pedirá que firme un formulario

de consentimiento). Sin embargo, usted se puede retirar de la investigación en cualquier momento sin que le afecte en modo alguno. Usted no tiene que dar una razón para retirarse.

Depende de usted decidir si su hijo(a) participa o no del proyecto de investigación. Si decide que su hijo puede participar, se le dará esta hoja de información para mantener (y se le pedirá que firme un formulario de consentimiento). Sin embargo, su hijo(a) puede retirarse de la investigación en cualquier momento sin que le afecte de ninguna manera, y sin dar razón alguna. Adicionalmente, se le pedirá autorización a su hijo(a), y su decisión será respetada en todo momento.

## **5. ¿Qué tengo que hacer?**

Si usted decide participar, tendrá que firmar un formulario de consentimiento en el que usted está de acuerdo en participar de una entrevista. Esta entrevista tendrá una duración de aproximadamente 30 a 45 minutos, y debe llevarse a cabo entre los meses de Mayo y Junio de 2015, en el momento y lugar a decidir.

Durante la entrevista vamos a hablar de varios temas relacionados con la educación de la primera infancia, del jardín infantil en específico, y sus ideas y percepciones respecto de la educación parvularia en general.

Adicionalmente, como parte del estudio, usted será invitada a una serie de discusiones colaborativas entre los participantes, que será organizada durante los primeros meses del segundo semestre, para reflexionar sobre los distintos temas abordados en las entrevistas y actividades. No obstante, cuando llegue el momento, se volverá a pedir su consentimiento, y usted puede retirarse de la actividad en cualquier momento si así lo desea.

## **6. ¿Qué tiene que hacer mi hijo(a)?**

Si autoriza a su hijo(a) a participar, tendrá que firmar un consentimiento informado en donde accede a que su hijo(a) participe en una actividad consistente en tomar fotografías del jardín infantil, hacer dibujos sobre este, y confeccionar un libro en donde puedan plasmar sus percepciones e ideas respecto de su jardín infantil.

Adicionalmente, su hijo(a) participará en una serie de observaciones grabadas que tendrán lugar dentro de la sala de clases, respecto de actividades diarias e interacciones con otros niños y la educadora. Estas observaciones se llevarán a cabo entre los meses de Abril a Junio de 2015, y serán coordinadas con la educadora.

## **7. ¿Se me grabará a mí y a mi hijo(a), y cómo se utilizarán los medios de comunicación grabados?**

Voy a hacer una grabación de audio y tomar notas durante la entrevista y discusiones colaborativas, con el fin de analizar la información de manera precisa. La grabación será transcrita y todas las referencias personales se

eliminarán si lo desea. Nadie fuera del equipo del proyecto podrá acceder a las grabaciones originales, las cuales se mantendrán a salvo en todo momento.

Adicionalmente, tomaré notas durante la actividad de confección del libro con su hijo(a), con el fin de analizar la información de manera detallada. Durante las observaciones, utilizaré una grabadora de video que será codificada y todas las referencias personales serán removidas. Nadie fuera del equipo del proyecto podrá acceder a las grabaciones originales, las cuales se mantendrán a salvo en todo momento.

#### **8. ¿Cuáles son los posibles beneficios de participar?**

Si bien no hay beneficios inmediatos para las personas que participan en el proyecto, se espera que esta investigación aporte a quienes diseñan políticas de primera infancia, en la comprensión de cómo las políticas de la primera infancia están siendo diseñadas, implementadas y evaluadas, y por lo tanto, ser capaz de mejorarlos y contribuir para el desarrollo integral de la educación de los niños y niñas en Chile.

#### **9. ¿Cuáles son las posibles desventajas y riesgos de tomar parte?**

Si bien no hay desventajas o riesgos de participar en esta investigación, si en algún momento de la entrevista se siente incómodo o desea detenerla, usted es libre de hacerlo sin dar ninguna razón. Similarmente, si su hijo(a) se siente incómodo(a) o no quiere seguir participando, podrá retirarse en cualquier momento sin dar una razón.

#### **10. ¿Mi participación y la de mi hijo(a) en este proyecto se mantendrá confidencial?**

Toda la información se almacenará y sólo será utilizada por el equipo de investigación, con fines de investigación. Si usted lo solicita, la información que se recolecte se mantendrá estrictamente confidencial y no será identificada o identificable en todos los informes o publicaciones; las grabaciones de audio se transcribirán y todas las referencias a datos personales serán removidas; y el investigador utilizará las transcripciones anónimas, no las grabaciones de voz reales. Luego de dos años de finalizado el proyecto, las grabaciones serán destruidas.

#### **11. ¿Qué pasará con los resultados del proyecto de investigación?**

Los resultados de este proyecto de investigación formarán parte de una tesis de doctorado. Algunos de los datos podrán ser utilizados para artículos de revistas o presentaciones en conferencias. Todos los resultados que se hagan públicos serán anónimos si así lo solicita, mediante la eliminación de cualquier información que pueda identificarle.

**12. ¿Quién está organizando y financiando la investigación?**

La investigación es parte de un proyecto de investigación para obtener un doctorado en Educación y se financia a través del Programa de Capital Humano Avanzado (Becas Chile) de Conicyt (Comisión Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología de Chile).

**13. ¿Quién ha revisado éticamente el proyecto?**

El comité de ética de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Sheffield ha revisado y aprobado este proyecto.

**14. Contacto para más información**

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta con respecto al proyecto de investigación y su participación, puede ponerse en contacto conmigo, Natalia Torres, en:

Teléfono celular: +56 9 58584002

Correo electrónico: [natorres1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:natorres1@sheffield.ac.uk)

**15. ¿Qué pasa si algo sale mal?**

Si el proyecto de investigación finaliza antes de la fecha prevista, se le notificará de ello por correo electrónico, junto con las razones de la interrupción del proyecto.

Si por alguna razón, usted necesita plantear una queja sobre cualquier parte del procedimiento adoptado por el equipo de investigación, incluyendo el tratamiento que el investigador le dio durante la entrevista, puede ponerse en contacto con:

Supervisor del proyecto de investigación: Ansgar Allen

Correo electrónico: [a.allen@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:a.allen@sheffield.ac.uk)

Si usted siente que su queja no ha sido manejada a su satisfacción, usted puede ponerse en contacto con la Universidad de Sheffield en la oficina de "Registros y Secretaría".

**Muchas gracias por considerar este proyecto de investigación**

## **Appendix 6: Information Sheet for Practitioner (In Spanish)**

### **Hoja de Información**

***"El concepto de Calidad en Educación de la Primera Infancia en Chile: reproducción y resistencia de las políticas por parte de actores clave"***

#### **1. Invitación**

Usted está siendo invitada a participar en un proyecto de investigación. Antes de decidir, es importante que usted entienda los objetivos de la investigación y cuáles son las actividades que incluye. Por favor tome tiempo para leer la información descrita en este documento y discutir con otros, si lo desea. Por favor, siéntase libre de preguntar al equipo de investigación si hay algo que no está claro o si necesita más información, y tomar el tiempo que necesite para decidir si desea o no participar. Muchas gracias por leer esto.

Esta investigación está siendo llevada a cabo por la señorita Natalia Torres, estudiante de doctorado de la Universidad de Sheffield, con el apoyo del CIAE (Centro de Investigación Avanzada en Educación) de la Universidad de Chile.

#### **2. ¿Cuál es el propósito de este proyecto?**

La educación de la primera infancia ha estado en el centro de las reformas educativas en los últimos años en Chile, y su relevancia ha sido apoyada por la evidencia internacional, afirmando que una educación de calidad en la primera infancia puede tener impacto en el desarrollo integral de los niños. Por esta razón, es importante entender cómo las políticas se están diseñando en Chile, cuáles son los conceptos que se utilizan para el diseño de ellos, y qué entiende por calidad y equidad en la educación de la primera infancia. Por lo tanto, el objetivo principal de esta investigación es entender cuáles son las definiciones que los diferentes actores clave involucrados en la educación de la primera infancia, tienen con respecto a los conceptos de calidad y equidad, y cómo estas definiciones influyen en el proceso de diseño, implementación y evaluación de las políticas.

#### **3. ¿Por qué he sido elegido?**

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo incluir participantes en los diferentes niveles de educación de la primera infancia en Chile. Por esta razón, actores claves involucrados en la implementación de educación de la primera infancia en instituciones del estado, han sido elegidos como participantes potenciales, y usted ha sido seleccionado como uno de ellos.

#### **4. ¿Tengo que participar?**

Su participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria, y depende de usted decidir si debe o no tomar parte. Si usted decide participar, se le dará esta hoja de información para mantener (y se le pedirá que firme un formulario de consentimiento). Sin embargo, usted se puede retirar de la investigación en

cualquier momento sin que le afecte en modo alguno Usted no tiene que dar una razón para retirarse.

## **5. ¿Qué tengo que hacer?**

Si usted decide participar, tendrá que firmar un formulario de consentimiento en el que usted está de acuerdo en participar de una entrevista, y en la que me deja saber su fecha, hora y lugar preferido, con el fin de coordinar la misma. Esta entrevista tendrá una duración de aproximadamente 30 a 45 minutos, y debe llevarse a cabo entre los meses de Mayo y Junio de 2015, en el momento y lugar a decidir.

Durante la entrevista vamos a hablar de varios temas relacionados con la educación de la primera infancia y las políticas diseñadas en Chile, cómo estas políticas se están diseñando e implementando, así como también sus ideas respecto a la implementación de tales políticas en el contexto específico de su jardín infantil y sala de clases.

Adicionalmente, como parte del estudio, pediré su autorización para observar y grabar (a través de una cámara de video) una serie de actividades dentro de la sala de clases, cada una de las cuales será previamente acordada con usted y las asistentes. No obstante, cada vez que se realice una grabación, se volverá a pedir su autorización y usted tendrá derecho a no acceder.

Por último, usted será invitada a una serie de discusiones colaborativas entre los participantes, que será organizada durante los primeros meses del segundo semestre, para reflexionar sobre los distintos temas abordados en las entrevistas y actividades. No obstante, cuando llegue el momento, se volverá a pedir su consentimiento, y usted puede retirarse de la actividad en cualquier momento si así lo desea.

## **6. ¿Se me grabará, y cómo se utilizarán los medios de comunicación grabados?**

Voy a hacer una grabación de audio y tomar notas durante la entrevista y discusiones colaborativas, con el fin de analizar la información de manera precisa. La grabación será transcrita y todas las referencias personales se eliminarán. Para las grabaciones de actividades en la sala de clases, se utilizará una cámara de video, y estas serán analizadas y categorizadas sin referencias personales. Nadie fuera del equipo del proyecto podrá acceder a las grabaciones originales, a menos que usted indique lo contrario, y estas cuales se mantendrán a salvo en todo momento.

## **7. ¿Cuáles son los posibles beneficios de participar?**

Si bien no hay beneficios inmediatos para las personas que participan en el proyecto, se espera que esta investigación aporte a quienes diseñan políticas de primera infancia, en la comprensión de cómo las políticas de la primera infancia están siendo diseñadas, implementadas y evaluadas, y por lo tanto, ser capaz

de mejorarlos y contribuir para el desarrollo integral de la educación de los niños y niñas en Chile.

**8. ¿Cuáles son las posibles desventajas y riesgos de tomar parte?**

Si bien no hay desventajas o riesgos de participar en esta investigación, si en algún momento de la entrevista se siente incómodo o desea detenerla, usted es libre de hacerlo sin dar ninguna razón.

**9. ¿Mi participación en este proyecto se mantendrá confidencial?**

Toda la información se almacenará y sólo será utilizada por el equipo de investigación, con fines de investigación. La información que se recolecte se mantendrá estrictamente confidencial y no será identificada o identificable en todos los informes o publicaciones, a menos que usted lo autorice; las grabaciones de audio y video se transcribirán y todas las referencias a datos personales serán removidas; y el investigador utilizará las transcripciones anónimas, no las grabaciones de voz reales. Luego de dos años de finalizado el proyecto, las grabaciones serán destruidas.

**10. ¿Qué pasará con los resultados del proyecto de investigación?**

Los resultados de este proyecto de investigación formarán parte de una tesis de doctorado. Algunos de los datos podrán ser utilizados para artículos de revistas o presentaciones en conferencias. Todos los resultados que se hagan públicos serán anónimos si así lo solicita, mediante la eliminación de cualquier información que pueda identificarle.

**11. ¿Quién está organizando y financiando la investigación?**

La investigación es parte de un proyecto de investigación para obtener un doctorado en Educación y se financia a través del Programa de Capital Humano Avanzado (Becas Chile) de Conicyt (Comisión Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología de Chile).

**12. ¿Quién ha revisado éticamente el proyecto?**

El comité de ética de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Sheffield ha revisado y aprobado este proyecto.

**13. Contacto para más información**

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta con respecto al proyecto de investigación y su participación, puede ponerse en contacto conmigo, Natalia Torres, en:

Teléfono celular: +56 9 58584002

Correo electrónico: natorres1@sheffield.ac.uk



#### **14. ¿Qué pasa si algo sale mal?**

Si el proyecto de investigación finaliza antes de la fecha prevista, se le notificará de ello por correo electrónico, junto con las razones de la interrupción del proyecto.

Si por alguna razón, usted necesita plantear una queja sobre cualquier parte del procedimiento adoptado por el equipo de investigación, incluyendo el tratamiento que el investigador le dio durante la entrevista, puede ponerse en contacto con:  
Supervisor del proyecto de investigación: Ansgar Allen

Correo electrónico: a.allen@sheffield.ac.uk

Si usted siente que su queja no ha sido manejada a su satisfacción, usted puede ponerse en contacto con la Universidad de Sheffield en la oficina de “Registros y Secretaría”, a través de este link <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/registrar/contact>

**Muchas gracias por considerar este proyecto de investigación**

## **Appendix 7: Information Sheet for Teaching Assistant (In Spanish)**

### **Hoja de Información**

***"El concepto de Calidad en Educación de la Primera Infancia en Chile: reproducción y resistencia de las políticas por parte de actores clave"***

#### **1. Invitación**

Usted está siendo invitada a participar en un proyecto de investigación. Antes de decidir, es importante que usted entienda los objetivos de la investigación y cuáles son las actividades que incluye. Por favor tome tiempo para leer la información descrita en este documento y discutir con otros, si lo desea. Por favor, siéntase libre de preguntar al equipo de investigación si hay algo que no está claro o si necesita más información, y tomar el tiempo que necesite para decidir si desea o no participar. Muchas gracias por leer esto.

Esta investigación está siendo llevada a cabo por la señorita Natalia Torres, estudiante de doctorado de la Universidad de Sheffield, con el apoyo del CIAE (Centro de Investigación Avanzada en Educación) de la Universidad de Chile.

#### **2. ¿Cuál es el propósito de este proyecto?**

La educación de la primera infancia ha estado en el centro de las reformas educativas en los últimos años en Chile, y su relevancia ha sido apoyada por la evidencia internacional, afirmando que una educación de calidad en la primera infancia puede tener impacto en el desarrollo integral de los niños. Por esta razón, es importante entender cómo las políticas se están diseñando en Chile, cuáles son los conceptos que se utilizan para el diseño de ellos, y qué entiende por calidad y equidad en la educación de la primera infancia. Por lo tanto, el objetivo principal de esta investigación es entender cuáles son las definiciones que los diferentes actores clave involucrados en la educación de la primera infancia, tienen con respecto a los conceptos de calidad y equidad, y cómo estas definiciones influyen en el proceso de diseño, implementación y evaluación de las políticas.

#### **3. ¿Por qué he sido elegido?**

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo incluir participantes en los diferentes niveles de educación de la primera infancia en Chile. Por esta razón, actores claves involucrados en la implementación de educación de la primera infancia en instituciones del estado, han sido elegidos como participantes potenciales, y usted ha sido seleccionado como uno de ellos.

#### **4. ¿Tengo que participar?**

Su participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria, y depende de usted decidir si debe o no tomar parte. Si usted decide participar, se le dará esta hoja de información para mantener (y se le pedirá que firme un formulario de consentimiento). Sin embargo, usted se puede retirar de la investigación en

cualquier momento sin que le afecte en modo alguno Usted no tiene que dar una razón para retirarse.

## **5. ¿Qué tengo que hacer?**

Si usted decide participar, tendrá que firmar un formulario de consentimiento en el que usted está de acuerdo en participar de una entrevista, y en la que me deja saber su fecha, hora y lugar preferido, con el fin de coordinar la misma. Esta entrevista tendrá una duración de aproximadamente 30 a 45 minutos, y debe llevarse a cabo entre los meses de Mayo y Junio de 2015, en el momento y lugar a decidir.

Durante la entrevista vamos a hablar de varios temas relacionados con la educación de la primera infancia y las políticas diseñadas en Chile, cómo estas políticas se están diseñando e implementando, así como también sus ideas respecto a la implementación de tales políticas en el contexto específico de su jardín infantil y sala de clases.

Adicionalmente, como parte del estudio, pediré su autorización para observar y grabar (a través de una cámara de video) una serie de actividades dentro de la sala de clases, cada una de las cuales será previamente acordada con usted y la educadora. No obstante, cada vez que se realice una grabación, se volverá a pedir su autorización y usted tendrá derecho a no acceder.

Por último, usted será invitada a una serie de discusiones colaborativas entre los participantes, que será organizada durante los primeros meses del segundo semestre, para reflexionar sobre los distintos temas abordados en las entrevistas y actividades. No obstante, cuando llegue el momento, se volverá a pedir su consentimiento, y usted puede retirarse de la actividad en cualquier momento si así lo desea.

## **6. ¿Se me grabará, y cómo se utilizarán los medios de comunicación grabados?**

Voy a hacer una grabación de audio y tomar notas durante la entrevista y discusiones colaborativas, con el fin de analizar la información de manera precisa. La grabación será transcrita y todas las referencias personales se eliminarán. Para las grabaciones de actividades en la sala de clases, se utilizará una cámara de video, y estas serán analizadas y categorizadas sin referencias personales. Nadie fuera del equipo del proyecto podrá acceder a las grabaciones originales, a menos que usted indique lo contrario, y estas cuales se mantendrán a salvo en todo momento.

## **7. ¿Cuáles son los posibles beneficios de participar?**

Si bien no hay beneficios inmediatos para las personas que participan en el proyecto, se espera que esta investigación aporte a quienes diseñan políticas de primera infancia, en la comprensión de cómo las políticas de la primera infancia están siendo diseñadas, implementadas y evaluadas, y por lo tanto, ser capaz

de mejorarlos y contribuir para el desarrollo integral de la educación de los niños y niñas en Chile.

**8. ¿Cuáles son las posibles desventajas y riesgos de tomar parte?**

Si bien no hay desventajas o riesgos de participar en esta investigación, si en algún momento de la entrevista se siente incómodo o desea detenerla, usted es libre de hacerlo sin dar ninguna razón.

**9. ¿Mi participación en este proyecto se mantendrá confidencial?**

Toda la información se almacenará y sólo será utilizada por el equipo de investigación, con fines de investigación. La información que se recolecte se mantendrá estrictamente confidencial y no será identificada o identificable en todos los informes o publicaciones, a menos que usted lo autorice; las grabaciones de audio y video se transcribirán y todas las referencias a datos personales serán removidas; y el investigador utilizará las transcripciones anónimas, no las grabaciones de voz reales. Luego de dos años de finalizado el proyecto, las grabaciones serán destruidas.

**10. ¿Qué pasará con los resultados del proyecto de investigación?**

Los resultados de este proyecto de investigación formarán parte de una tesis de doctorado. Algunos de los datos podrán ser utilizados para artículos de revistas o presentaciones en conferencias. Todos los resultados que se hagan públicos serán anónimos si así lo solicita, mediante la eliminación de cualquier información que pueda identificarle.

**11. ¿Quién está organizando y financiando la investigación?**

La investigación es parte de un proyecto de investigación para obtener un doctorado en Educación y se financia a través del Programa de Capital Humano Avanzado (Becas Chile) de Conicyt (Comisión Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología de Chile).

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Teléfono celular: +56 9 58584002

Correo electrónico: [natorres1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:natorres1@sheffield.ac.uk)

#### **14. ¿Qué pasa si algo sale mal?**

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Si por alguna razón, usted necesita plantear una queja sobre cualquier parte del procedimiento adoptado por el equipo de investigación, incluyendo el tratamiento que el investigador le dio durante la entrevista, puede ponerse en contacto con:

Supervisor del proyecto de investigación: Ansgar Allen

Correo electrónico: [a.allen@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:a.allen@sheffield.ac.uk)

Si usted siente que su queja no ha sido manejada a su satisfacción, usted puede ponerse en contacto con la Universidad de Sheffield en la oficina de “Registros y Secretaría”, a través de este link <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/registrar/contact>

**Muchas gracias por considerar este proyecto de investigación**

## Appendix 8: Informed Consent Stakeholders (In Spanish)

**Título de Proyecto de Investigación:** El Concepto de Calidad en Educación de Primera Infancia en Chile: Reproducción y Resistencia de Políticas desde Actores Claves.

**Nombre de Investigador:** Natalia Andrea Torres Carreño

**Número de Identificación de Participante:**  
con una cruz

Por favor marque

1. Confirmando que he leído y entiendo la hoja de información con fecha Noviembre 2014 explicando el proyecto de investigación y he tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas sobre el proyecto.
2. Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria y que soy libre de retirarme en cualquier momento y sin dar ninguna razón, sin que tenga consecuencias negativas. Además, de no querer responder a cualquier pregunta o preguntas, yo soy libre de no hacerlo.
3. Entiendo que mis respuestas se mantendrán estrictamente confidenciales doy permiso a los miembros del equipo de investigación para tener acceso a mis respuestas. Entiendo que, si lo solicito, mi nombre no se vinculará con ningún material de investigación, y no voy a ser identificado o identificable en el informe o los informes que resulten de la investigación.
4. Autorizo a que la información recolectada sea utilizada en futuras Investigaciones.
5. Estoy de acuerdo en participar del proyecto descrito.
6. La mejor fecha y hora para contactarme entre el 1 de noviembre y el 31 de diciembre es

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_ Hora: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre de Participante  
(o representante legal)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigador Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma

**Copias:**

Una vez que esto ha sido firmado por todas las partes, el participante debe recibir una copia del formulario de consentimiento informado firmado y fechado, la hoja de información, y cualquier otra información escrita proporcionada a los participantes. Una copia del formulario de consentimiento firmado y fechado, debe ser colocado en el expediente principal del proyecto (por ejemplo, un archivador), que debe mantenerse en un lugar seguro.

## Appendix 9: Informed Consent Parents (In Spanish)

**Título de Proyecto de Investigación:** El Concepto de Calidad en Educación de Primera Infancia en Chile: Reproducción y Resistencia de Políticas desde Actores Claves.

**Nombre de Investigador:** Natalia Andrea Torres Carreño

**Número de Identificación de Participante:**  
**una cruz**

**Por favor marque con**

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 4. Confirmando que he leído y entiendo la hoja de información con fecha Marzo 2015 explicando el proyecto de investigación y he tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas sobre el proyecto.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria y que soy libre de retirarme en cualquier momento y sin dar ninguna razón, sin que tenga consecuencias negativas. Además, de no querer responder a cualquier pregunta o preguntas, yo soy libre de no hacerlo.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Entiendo que la participación de mi hijo(a) es voluntaria y que puedo retirarlo(a) en cualquier momento sin dar una razón, y sin que tenga consecuencias negativas.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Entiendo que mis respuestas se mantendrán estrictamente confidenciales. Doy permiso a los miembros del equipo de investigación para tener acceso a mis respuestas. Entiendo que, si lo solicito, mi nombre no se vinculará con ningún material de investigación, y no voy a ser identificado o identificable en el informe o los informes que resulten de la investigación.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Entiendo que las respuestas de mi hijo(a) se mantendrán estrictamente confidenciales. Autorizo a los miembros del equipo de investigación para tener acceso a sus respuestas. Entiendo que el nombre de mi hijo(a) no será vinculado con ningún material de investigación, y él/ella no será identificado(a) o identificable en el informe o los informes que resulten de la investigación. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Autorizo a que la información recolectada sea utilizada en futuras investigaciones.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Autorizo a que la información recolectada en actividades con mi hijo(a) sea utilizada en futuras investigaciones.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Estoy de acuerdo en participar del proyecto descrito a través de una entrevista personal.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Estoy de acuerdo en que mi hijo(a) participe del Proyecto descrito en una actividad a realizarse dentro del jardín con la investigadora.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |



Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Hora: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre de Participante  
(o representante legal)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigador Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma

**Copias:**

Una vez que esto ha sido firmado por todas las partes, el participante debe recibir una copia del formulario de consentimiento informado firmado y fechado, la hoja de información, y cualquier otra información escrita proporcionada a los participantes. Una copia del formulario de consentimiento firmado y fechado, debe ser colocado en el expediente principal del proyecto (por ejemplo, un archivador), que debe mantenerse en un lugar seguro.

**Appendix 10: Informed Consent Practitioners and Teaching Assistant  
(In Spanish)**

**Título de Proyecto de Investigación: El Concepto de Calidad en Educación de Primera Infancia en Chile: Reproducción y Resistencia de Políticas desde Actores Claves.**

**Nombre de Investigador: Natalia Andrea Torres Carreño**

**Número de Identificación de Participante:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Por favor**  
**marque con una cruz**

1. Confirmando que he leído y entiendo la hoja de información con fecha Marzo 2015 explicando el proyecto de investigación y he tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas sobre el proyecto.
2. Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria y que soy libre de retirarme en cualquier momento y sin dar ninguna razón, sin que tenga consecuencias negativas. Además, de no querer responder a cualquier pregunta o preguntas, yo soy libre de no hacerlo.
3. Entiendo que mis respuestas se mantendrán estrictamente confidenciales. Doy permiso a los miembros del equipo de investigación para tener acceso a mis respuestas. Entiendo que mi nombre no se vinculará con ningún material de investigación, y no voy a ser identificado o identificable en el informe o los informes que resulten de la investigación, a menos que solicite ser identificado.
4. Autorizo a que la información recolectada sea utilizada en futuras Investigaciones.
5. Estoy de acuerdo en participar del proyecto descrito.
6. La mejor fecha y hora para contactarme entre el 1 de Mayo y el 30 de Junio es  
 Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_ Hora: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre de Participante Fecha  
(o representante legal)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigador Principal Fecha Firma

**Copias:**

Una vez que esto ha sido firmado por todas las partes, el participante debe recibir una copia del formulario de consentimiento informado firmado y fechado, la hoja de información, y cualquier otra información escrita proporcionada a los participantes. Una copia del formulario de consentimiento firmado y fechado, debe ser colocado en el expediente principal del proyecto (por ejemplo, un archivador), que debe mantenerse en un lugar seguro.

## Lámina 1

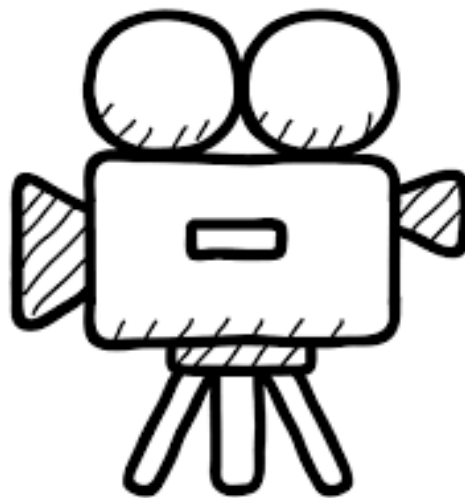
¿Te gustaría que observara tus actividades en clases?




Me gustaría	<b><u>No</u></b> me gustaría
	

## Lámina 2

¿Te gustaría que grabara tus actividades en clases?



Me gustaría	<u>No</u> me gustaría
	

### Lámina 3

¿Te gustaría que observara tus actividades en el patio?



Me gustaría	<u>No</u> me gustaría
	

## Lámina 4

¿Te gustaría que compartiera lo que aprendimos juntos, con otros investigadores?



Me gustaría que Natalia compartiera  
nuestros descubrimientos



## Lámina 5

Si te sientes mal (aburrido/a, enojada/o, etc.) o quieres dejar de participar, puedes hacerlo en cualquier momento. Si quieres volver a participar, también puedes hacerlo en cualquier momento.



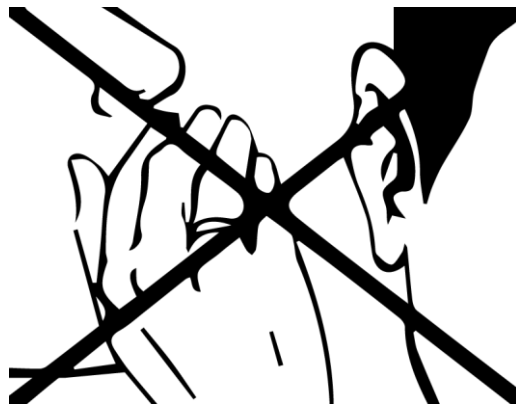
Entiendo que puedo dejar de participar cuando quiera





## Lámina 6

No voy a contarle a nadie lo que converse contigo durante las actividades, a menos que tú quieras.

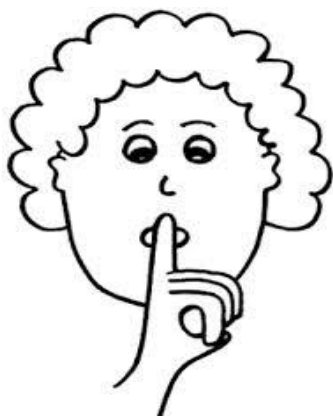


Entiendo que Natalia no hablará con otros sobre lo que conversemos



## Lámina 7

Sólo yo sabré tu nombre, y cuando compartas lo que aprendimos con otros investigadores, usaré el sobrenombre que tú elijas.



Entiendo que Natalia no dirá a nadie  
mi nombre



## Appendix 12: Informed Consent for Photograph and Album Activity

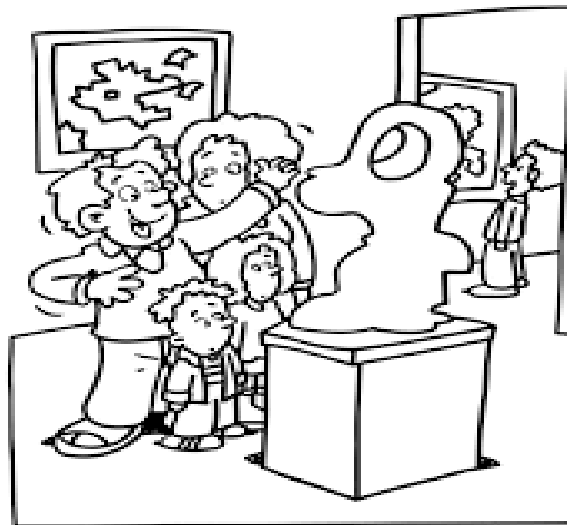
### Lámina 1

Un investigador o investigadora puede leer sobre el tema que le gustaría aprender



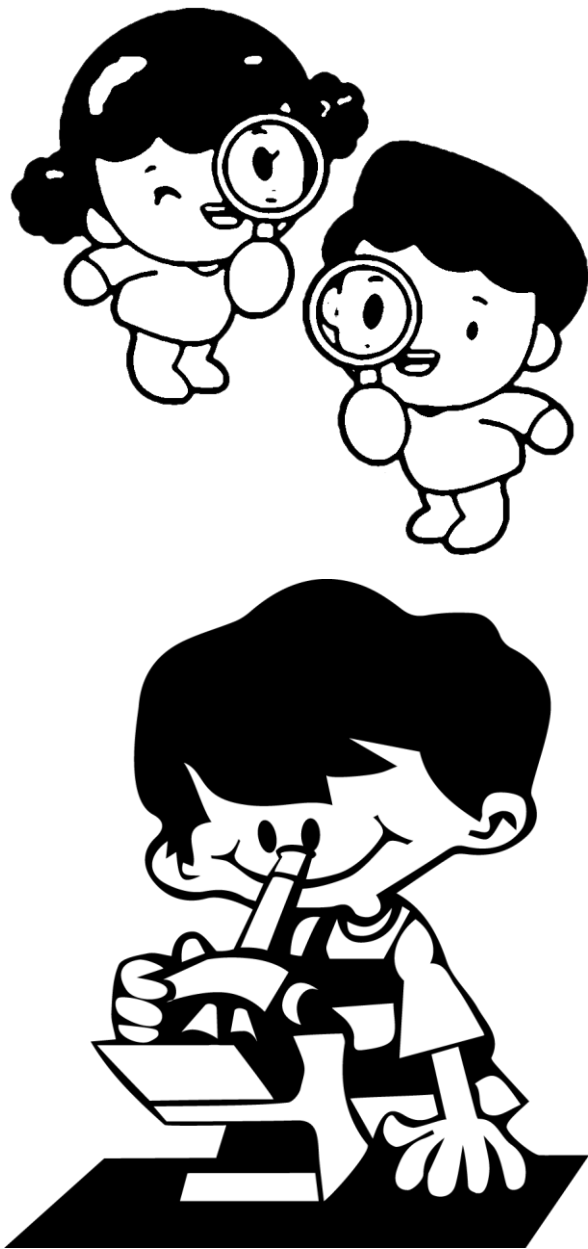
## Lámina 2

Puede ir a observar a un lugar, cosas que le ayuden a aprender sobre un tema.



## Lámina 3

También puede observar desde más cerca un objeto para saber cómo funciona y aprender sobre él.



## Lámina 4

Puede preguntarle a otras personas que saben más sobre ese tema, distintas cosas que le ayuden a aprender.



## Lámina 5

¿Te gustaría participar conmigo en una actividad, sacando fotos de tu jardín?



Me gustaría participar	<b><u>No</u></b> me gustaría participar
	

## Lámina 6

¿Te gustaría participar conmigo en una actividad, haciendo un libro de fotos y dibujos de tu jardín?



Me gustaría participar	<b><u>No</u></b> me gustaría participar
	



## **Appendix 13: Guiding Questions for Interview with Stakeholders**

### **Interview Questions to key actors**

#### **a. Actor involved in social (students) movement**

##### Student Movement

1. What is the role you currently play in the student federation and how long ago have you been working there?
2. How did you get involved in the student movement and what was your role then?
3. According to the demands proposed by the student movement, How was early childhood education incorporated incorporated (or not)?
4. What do you think were the guidelines regarding early childhood education within the student movement?
5. How does your experience in ECE influenced or contributed to the discussion within the movement?

##### Chilean context in ECE

6. How would you describe the current context of early childhood education in Chile? What have been the major advances? What are the biggest challenges?
7. What do you believe are the pillars of early childhood education in Chile and the reforms introduced in recent years?

##### Quality and Equity in ECE

8. In relation to the policies promoted in early childhood education, How do you think the concepts of quality and equity are understood?
9. Based on your experience, how do you understand the concepts of quality and equity in early childhood education?
10. How do you think that ECE policies include the concepts of quality and equity in their design?
11. According to the definition of the concepts of quality and equity, how do you think that these are incorporated into the design of policies for early childhood education in Chile?
12. How would you evaluate quality and equity in early childhood education in Chile?
13. What are the key aspects in which the design of early childhood education policy should focus when addressing quality and equity?

## **b. Policy Makers working in State Institutions**

### Experience in the field

1. How long have you been working in early childhood education? What are the roles you have played and where?
2. What is the role you currently perform and from how long ago?
3. What motivated you to work in early childhood education?

### Chilean context in ECE

6. How would you describe the current context of early childhood education in Chile? What have been the major advances? What are the biggest challenges?
7. What do you believe are the pillars of early childhood education in Chile and the reforms introduced in recent years?

### Quality and Equity in ECE

8. In relation to the policies promoted in early childhood education, how do you think the concepts of quality and equity are understood?
9. Based on your experience, how do you understand the concepts of quality and equity in early childhood education?
10. How do you think that ECE policies include the concepts of quality and equity in their design?
11. According to the definition of the concepts of quality and equity, how do you think that these are incorporated into the design of policies for early childhood education in Chile?
12. How would you evaluate quality and equity in early childhood education in Chile?
13. What are the key aspects in which the design of early childhood education policy should focus when addressing quality and equity?