Learning – a creative enterprise

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Abstract

Inherent in early childhood curriculum documents such as Te Whāriki and Kei tua o te pai is a humanist tradition of the creative individual engaged in free play and exploration. This child-centred pedagogy appears to be at odds with increasing regulatory requirements occurring in the sector. Business and technology metaphors increasingly underpin teaching and learning within the sector; characterized in terms of quality criteria and minimum standards. The policy shift towards this instrumental view of early childhood care and education is examined in this paper in terms of the creative individual of curriculum documents and the creative individual in an enterprise culture.

Introduction

A major educational ideal in liberal education theory is the humanist belief in the individual as a worthy and valued subject. This is reflected in the liberal framework of curriculum documents such as *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and *Kei tua o te pai* (Ministry of Education, 2004). At the heart of these texts are notions of reciprocity, sharing and negotiation between child and adult; and mutual reconstruction through community, intergenerational dialogue, project and inquiry. These documents are redolent with images of the child as a 'competent' 'capable' (ibid) curious child creatively at play in a multicultural Garden of Eden. Such images appear to be at odds with the institutions, policies and practices that characterise the globalised and economic rationalities that increasingly govern early childhood practices in the 21st Century. The argument in this paper is that the social, political and cultural basis of the official curriculum challenges the assumptions upon which the broader policy environment is evolving. An examination of the curriculum documents, *Te Whāriki* and *Kei tua o te pai*, point to an inconsistency between the appeal to community – the dialogical and community-based focus of these documents – and the increasingly managerialised, regulatory framework in which they are supposed to operate. The paper also questions the validity of market relations as a basis for early childhood care and education.

The paper draws on Ricoeur's theory of narrative, in particular his hermeneutic of selfhood as an interpreted and narrated self vested in social practices, to examine early education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the idea of the child as an intersubject. The first part of this paper deals with the institutions that house young children and examines the policy environment. The second part of this paper draws upon recent scholarship in early childhood, in particular the recourse to sociocultural theory and suggests that Ricoeur's notion of intersubjectivity to be of particular value in examining the policies and practices that underpin the institutions in which young children develop their identities.

Just institutions

Although Ricoeur did not comment specifically on matters of early childhood education he had a great deal to say about just institutions, identity and dialogical relationships, all of which are important concepts in education. Ricoeur's notion of 'just institutions' within an ethic of care, is in line with calls for the teacher as political educators (May, 1999, Dahlberg & Moss, 2005), a position that appears to have been lost in the current climate of outcomes-based; evidence-informed learning that permeates contemporary education. For Ricoeur, one's identity (a narrative identity) is directly tied to living in community with others:

> It is within the *interesse* that the hope (*le souhait*) of living well achieves its goal. It is as citizens that we become human. The hope to live within just institutions means nothing else (PS, p. xv).

We therefore understand Ricoeur's notion of institution as 'members of a historical community who exercise in an indivisible manner their desire to live together' (OA, p. 305). Ricoeur defines institution in the following way:

> By institution we are to understand the structure of living together as this belongs to a historical community – people, nation, region and so forth – a structure irreducible to interpersonal relations and yet bound up with these in a remarkable sense … (OA, p. 194).

Ricoeur emphasised the necessity to see the self, the other, and institutions as intimately connected and necessary to answer the questions of how one is to act. It is inside of institutions that individuals and communities develop their identities and for Ricoeur it is in just institutions that identities are formed in shared and negotiated ways. Therefore, just institutions are places where dialogical and reciprocal relationships between adults and children are developed.

Seen in this way then, education and its institutions are uniquely involved in the identity of individuals and communities and educators are automatically involved with the development of selfhood and so there is a requirement to question the aims, values and interdependent relationships that shape the process of self-formation. This emphasises the ethical commitment to be undertaken when thinking about and planning for institutions (early childhood centres) that house human subjects. Inside such institutions, humans can be seen to be involved in a myriad of practices whose rules are constitutively and socially established. These practices rely upon traditions and rules which are communicated and shared; subject to comparison and to standards of excellence which act as both self appraisal and potential norms and which provide the basis for further communication. Within these practices we develop our personal identities, our identifications and evaluations of what we see to be good and just in relations with others. Ricoeur's emphasis on response and responsibility, self and other; his understanding of the importance of dialogue and reciprocity within just institutions is suggestive of the need for educators to show the ethical significance of every choice made, and to establish goals to allow for the greatest possible participation in discussion and decision making.

Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity develops the idea that a narrative and the means by which it is transmitted – the text – tells us some truth about the world – that it is through the narrativisation of text that we construct meaning and value and hence our identity is an ethical commitment to an other. In his view, narrative is the way we form new understandings of society and forms of living together, and this corresponds with a subject that is free and bearing individual rights. Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy suggests that the process of self-identification is fluid, dynamic, and negotiable, based on interaction with the communities of which we are a part.

Ethics and care

The fundamental question of Ricoeur's ethics is: how shall I live? For Ricoeur, ethics comes down to a question of care: without care or concern, human action would not be possible. In his history of care, Reich (1995) reveals a range of meanings of care but with a subtle coherence. These meanings include care as a basic concern for people, ideas, institutions; taking care of one's own responsibilities; and caring for another person. All these meanings of care, share a care for someone or something with a preparedness to worry about him, her, or it. A history of care shows that, at one level, care is a precondition for ethical commitment to life in a variety of settings - philosophical, psychological, theological, educational, etc.

A question that has emerged recently in the philosophy of education is why the notion of care has not become more popular and has not exerted more influence in ethics, in view of its highly significant, if somewhat limited, history. The answer lies, in part, in the fact that care has always been considered a minor tradition of thought and practice: historically undervalued as an intellectually undemanding and unsophisticated activity. While education is seen as intellectually demanding, caring, in contrast, is portrayed as a natural activity of women, less intellectually rigorous and therefore of less importance (Tronto, 1993). However, care is increasingly becoming an issue of community and national importance, in particular, the care of infants and children under five. As Moss & Petrie (2002) argue, child care now has high public

exposure, although little consideration has been given to an understanding of care. Instead, the overriding concern in policy has been on the notion of 'quality'. Vincent and Ball (2006) argue that policy makers are more concerned with the regulation and commodification of care through regulatory criteria of quality than they are about engaging with a 'pedagogy of care' (Vincent & Ball, 2006). The capacity to care or be concerned about things, persons, a whole life-course, or a society is not compatible with reducing care to quality indicators (Moss 2007, Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Gibbons, 2007).

This focus on regulating for 'quality' rather than engaging with care places a veneer over the practical, ethical and social issues and masks over a myriad of concerns, not least of which, the question *who should care?* Child care and education has historical roots within a variety of disciplines and discourses including, psychology, medicine, child and social welfare, the not-for-profit and the charities sector. Its current position within a strongly privatised-market provision paradigm has seen early childhood care provision become a site of private investment. The relative merits of this provision – where early childhood care and education is conceptualised as a private good as opposed to a public good – is little referred to in policy discussions. In this way child care has become not so much a site of democracy but rather a site of economic regulation where the dominant discourse about children and their relationships with parents and society, Moss & Petrie (2002) argue, assumes 'that children are the *private* responsibility of parents; that children are *passive* dependants; and that parents are *consumers* of marketised services for children'(p. 5). This arrangement assures a regulatory service provider arrangement but does not focus attention on the importance care assumes as a vision of the human condition.

Moss argues, however, that care is a deeply engaging emotion/idea that confronts and challenges rationalist, abstract, and impersonal systems of thought, and has far-reaching social, political and ethical implications. The task before us, I believe, is to more fully understand the complexity and the history of care and to do justice to the texts and the thinkers who have made this idea central to their work by assuring greater recognition of care as a site where the self and other engage in a mutually constitutive, reciprocal ways. Such recognition is required within institutions and institutional frameworks that engender a community praxis.

Te Whāriki: a narrative approach to learning and teaching

The vision of early childhood within key curriculum documents such as *Te Whāriki* and *Kei tua o te pai* is one of power-sharing and is indicative of community and dialogical education. These texts embody commitments to the liberal ideals of empowerment, belonging and wellbeing that are pivotal discourses within early childhood and subscribe to an ethic of care: reciprocity, mutuality and dialogical relationships. This vision frames early childhood care and education as multistoried and embracing of complexity.

The storied approach to planning and assessment in early childhood, embodied in the highly participatory community model of *Te Whāriki* and the assessment exemplars *Kei tua o te pai*, is underpinned by a strong recognition of family and community narratives. These narratives are embedded in historical, cultural horizons where the child subject is embedded in family and community: a 'natural', 'whole child', a 'confident', and 'capable' learner (Ministry of Education, 1996), situated within a vision of educational provision that is democratic, bicultural, and community-based. Both these texts are predicated on social and cultural theories involving dialogical relationships between child and adult.

While curriculum and scholarship point to the importance of community, negotiation and power-sharing (consistent with a sociocultural theorizing), the current institutionalisation and attendant emphasis on privatization of early childhood education poses issues. For example, in an increasingly managerialised and marketised environment, teachers are accountable to managers, accountants, head offices, shareholders, and the Ministry of Education; at the same time as forming a learning community with their children, with parents, with other teachers, and with other institutions across the sector. There are obvious tensions here, especially with the idea of making a profitable return for shareholders. A further example is with the framing of regulatory requirements that undermine the democratic, negotiated, non-prescriptive philosophy that underpins *Te Whāriki* and *Kei tua o te pai*. In accord with the curriculum documents, an open, participatory

and equitable environment for all players within the sector is critical. The use of these documents as accountability mechanisms militates against the spirit of open dialogue and debate at their very heart.

Furthermore, the push for a seamless education system, of which early childhood care and education is the first step in a lifelong process, is appealing (who wouldn't want an easy transition between the various education sectors?). However, the rearrangement of learning into commodified, standardized packages, although providing an easy fit with audit and accountability requirements, fails to treat young children with dignity and respect. Alignment of the educational environment with managerial practices of business is at odds with the historical horizons and the teaching practices of those within the community-based sector. This situation has the potential for "schoolification" of early childhood education where prescriptive outcomes and performance standards become the order of the day for children at a younger and younger age and increases the likelihood for early childhood education to be treated merely as a preparatory phase for primary school which, in effect, instrumentalises early childhood education.

The form of early education that is now promoted within highly institutionalized business enterprises begets a particular form of care and education that moves children further away from family and community narratives embedded in the historical, cultural horizons and humanist intentions of the curriculum documents *Te Whāriki* and *Kei tua o te pai*, and into an economic rationality and individualism of the marketplace. Community commitments are at odds with the current policy environment which promotes early childhood as being an important ingredient to a healthy and wealthy state in order to facilitate women's re-entry into the workforce to be regulated in a privatized, managerialised, outcomes/quality-focussed arena. The closed circuit nature of policy development under the guise of consultation (within limited time and frameworks) limits the scope of argumentation and contestability associated with the development of democratic curriculum practices. The relationships between child, family and community, highly valued in *Te Whāriki*, are, I believe, impoverished by an economic rationale which will impact on families and communities.

Arguably, the increasing professionalisation and regulation of the sector has bought about increased understanding of early education as a unique area of education and has brought about rapid advances. These advances include the imperative for highly educated teachers (equivalent degree status to that of the compulsory sector), and the renowned *Te Whāriki* (1996) which assures us of a Treaty-based model of bicultural partnership. This curriculum, of national and international significance has an enlightened conceptual framework based on the cultural and political beliefs of the minority indigenous people. However, it is also arguable that a great deal more could have happened within the sector and development could have been considerably different, if the Meade Report, *Education To Be More* (Department of Education, 1988) had been enacted in a way that was intended and if the hard work of those in early childhood had been acted upon during the 1990s – instead of placed in a 'drawer' for most of the 1990s.

In *Memory, history and forgetting* (2000) Ricoeur emphasises the importance of 'a just political memory'. Here he balances an official memory that is often ideologically motivated with the testimony of witnesses. Ricoeur's concern is with the way in which official history has a penchant for 'too much memory here, and too much forgetting there'. It is perhaps easy to forget the story of resistance and challenge of the mid-latter part of the 20th century by a strong private lobby and their steadfast refusal under both government, professional and public pressure to assure an educated teaching focus for the institutionalised care and education of young children (May, 2003). It may be of value to look back and remember and to ask the question: how come it took so long? To ask critical questions; to undertake a historical journey of the past 25 years in early education as an important endeavour to be undertaken in order to invoke a historical perspective.

Identity in service to the State

In *Political Essays* Ricoeur calls for a recovery of traditions in globalised market economies claiming that the expansion of global capitalism has resulted in 'anonymity,' 'dehumanization,' 'barbaric forms of urbanism,' and 'totalitarian peril'. The struggles of decolonisation and liberation are, he says, 'marked by the double necessity of entering into the global technical society and being rooted in the cultural past' (PS, p.

292). Ricoeur appears to be calling here for a recovery of history. What emerges is a call for a political role, a mediation of the inevitable pull toward consumer society by recovering past and living traditions that help resist the effects of a global capitalism. Ricoeur's focus on the 'good life' is bounded by an ethical commitment to what we determine to be good and to be valued. The aim is to balance technicity and universalism with cultural particularity. This is an instructive use of Ricoeur's semantic innovation in terms of being a political educator. Ricoeur's caution around the totality of the economic, points to the peril of skewing the historical and cultural horizons of such documents like *Te Whāriki* where the non-dialogical nature of policy and economic agendas is seen to marginalize the difference of particular cultural works, and to exclude the cultural and social differences of our increasingly multicultural society, in order to assure accountability and performance in an increasingly audit society.

Foucault (1990), Rose (1989) and Fendler (2001) describe how the *soul* has become an agent of change in the service of the Modern State. We have, it seems to me, forgotten education's existential, embodied project/problematic of personal identity and formation of character. Instead, the project of early childhood education is now in the service of an ordered pursuit of accountability, transparency and commodification where children have become learners; where teachers are regulated by authoritarian rationalities of state. Previously sacrosanct innermost qualities of being human, the soul is now an object of psychological and regulatory authority scaffolded through the modern social and education sciences and practiced upon in schools and early childhood centres:

> The discourse of educational psychology has constructed desires, hopes, and fears as rationalizable attributes….In order to be recognized – or recognize oneself – as educated, the subject understands and reflexively disciplines desires, feelings, loves, wishes and fears. The construction of the whole child is a relatively new configuration in educational discourse and inscribes a new target – or substance – for pedagogical technologies and self discipline….the new substance to be educated has normalcy as its object of desire (Fendler, 2001, p. 124).

The focus on 'the soul' is also embedded in discussions about diversity, voice, and multiculturalism with a focus on the dispositions and capacities of teachers and children. This form of humanism, through developmental pedagogies focuses on the actor as the agent of change through a social administration to produce an individual's own freedom. The construction of knowledge herein is tied to narratives of past, present, future produced in a linear, dialectical, developmental fashion through school practices

> which act as a moral technology, not merely inculcating obedience, but also seeking to shape personality through the child's emulation of the teacher, through the use of pastoral techniques to encourage self-knowledge and enhance the feeling of sympathetic identification, through establishing the links between virtue, honesty, and self denial and a purified pleasure (Rose, 1989, p. 223).

As Mozère claims, in her troubling of the liberal notion of identity, identity is important to the 'axiomatic of capitalism' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) and this is a major issue for education. While it would be facile to suggest that parents are no longer capable of raising their children on their own, and that early intervention and institutional care by experts is required, the new 'family-friendly' focus in social policy development has been to a large degree focussed upon de-familialisation policies through the increased institutionalisation of children's education and care. Promoting formal education for young children as a means of facilitating women's re-entry into the workforce is an explicit intention of the OECD and the New Zealand government. Of further concern though, and in keeping with education as the development of human capital, is the assembling of young children in centres that are becoming increasingly regulated and standardized, so that government policy – itself driven by imperatives of international trade – can become more efficient in normalizing the desired economy-friendly behaviour in the youngest sector of the education population. While the system ingenuously offers a variety of identities for each of us to adopt, and we even have the flexibility to switch innovatively between these identities, we do so, so long as we accept and don't endanger capitalism. This says Mozère is where the trouble with modern identity lies:

For what we usually call agency, or human liberty, and that Deleuze & Guattari name desire, must be kept strictly under control....But, at the same time – Deleuze & Guattari stress this point strongly – capitalism needs the creative force of desire, its innovative and explosive strength, to be able to feed on it for its own purpose. Otherwise capitalism risks suffocation. So as soon as desire explodes – one could say, agency is empowered – there is a double movement for the axiomatic of capitalism. One aspect is the recuperation of that which has given life (or birth) to innovation, and the other is the recuperation of the excess of desire, channelling the overflow back into old or newly patterned identities, keeping them under control (Mozère, 2007, p. 112).

So current projections of childhood grounded in modern scientific theory (such as developmental psychology) and rationalities of state (such as quality care indicators, key competencies, and learning outcomes) permeate curriculum and policy documents are resoundingly definitive in their assertion of what is true and valuable for children and families. This regulatory force calculates teaching/learning into commodified areas of professionalism; and promotes particular research orientations rather than vesting in teachers an ethical concern to critically engage with the notion of education.

The political educator

Reading *Te Whāriki* as historical, bicultural, non-prescriptive, feminist and political rather than part of an increasingly regulatory framing up of children's lives, I believe that there is a unique and generous invitation to enable the play of difference which is currently at risk. The unique historical horizon of *Te Whāriki* enables and promotes this play within new semantic spaces. The types of spaces increasing occupied by critical pedagogy and poststructural critique includes Moss's agonistic pluralism (2007) drawing upon the work of Chantal Mouffe; Gibbons' (2007) Foucaultian examinations of play, technology and care; Borgnon's (2007), Mozere's (2007) re-territorializing identities and Sellars' rhizomatic conceptualizations of curriculum (2007) based on the writings of Delueze and Guattari (to name a few) and of course the loosely affiliated reconceptualising group (including, for example, Dahlberg, Bloch, Cannella, Swadener). These scholars are developing quite different (from each other and from the mainstream) critical conversations about early childhood and offering new visions and possibilities for child-adult relations and the way in which we develop education.

Despite these creative conceptualizations and ethical commitments to the possibilities for childhood education more powerful political texts, such as OECD policy documents, promote an essentialised view of the child which emphasise control over authority; quality over creativity; and regulation over difference. The degree to which we are subject to government surveillance and the technicising of education obscures very real social issues and limits care and education. In particular, the research that underpins it is prescribed by a government funding scheme heavily prescribed by global authorities that rely upon a particularly mechanistic selection of 'evidence-informed' research. Is it still possible to structure education around, say creativity and difference, in order to create new authorities and meanings?

In her address to the 7th early childhood convention (1999), May sketched 'shifting landscapes surrounding the politics and pedagogy of early childhood', she suggested that 'there is a challenge to be active in constructing the future landscape of childhood. To be passive might allow the early years of childhood to be the site of "unfortunate experiments"' (p. 1). The reference here to Kelsey's 'New Zealand experiment' (1995) points to a concern with the neoliberal rationality of the early childhood policy environment. *Te Whāriki* was conceived and written within more than a token Maori framework; however, the use and re-representation of *Te Whāriki* within current policy environment can be seen as superficial and deliberately referential, rather than a form of deep cultural commitment.

Dialogue and intersubjectivity

Moss and Petrie (2002) have argued that children's services should be conceptualised as community institutions, public places where children and adults engage with a variety of projects. They argue that 'community cannot be recreated from the top' rather it must be 'negotiated, justified and experienced' (ibid,

p. 40). In promoting a concept of a 'children's space' they promote a revitalisation of democracy. For them, spaces rather than services carry greater possibilities including

> a *cultural* space, where values, rights and cultures are created; and a *discursive* space for differing perspectives and forms of expression, where there is room for dialogue, confrontation…deliberation and critical thinking, where children and others can speak and be heard. In this sense, the concept of 'children's space' implies possibilities for children and adults to contest understandings, values, practices and knowledges (ibid, p. 9).

The concept of children's space is linked to an ethos, constituted by a certain type of relationship between children and adults, which carries with it an engagement of mutuality between child and adult and raises the complex issues of how to work with 'diversity and complexity, uncertainty and plurality' in a democratic and ethical manner (ibid, p. 13). Issues such as care, frequently transformed into technical issues – the application of standardised criteria (for example quality); or managerialised for effective control and quick fix remedies - represent a feature of advanced liberalism which promotes autonomy, individual responsibility and individuated independence. Forms of human beingness: for example, play, creativity and care are all too frequently not recognised and are relegated to a private sphere. The values of caring and nurturance, of stressing the importance of human relationships as key elements of the good life, remain perhaps 'enticing possibilities in a culture that stresses, as its bottom line, an unlimited concern with productivity and progress' (Tronto, 1993, p. 2).

Moss (2007) points out, the 'prospect of engaging politically may be daunting and even a touch naïve' but arriving at consensus is not the aim. Drawing upon Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, he argues that rather than domesticating difference and diffusing antagonism, a condition for democracy should be that it recognises and legitimates conflict and different perspectives without requiring domination. While this is perhaps a Utopian hope, Moss claims that the very least politicians, policy makers and the media should be aware of is that there is more than 'one perspective on early childhood education' and that there is more than 'one narrative to be told' (Moss, 2007, p. 237).

Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy embraces the notion of playing philosophically with dialectical difficulty neither requiring a consensus nor allowing an impasse. This philosophical playing is serious game of language where attendance to the dialogue of the other requires a form of concern or care for oneself as well as one's counterpoint - other through a courage of mutual understanding. While Ricoeur's hermeneutic brings together and contemporizes the abyss between child and adult, it is not in order to reach a final destination, rather it is:

> a hermeneutics of recollection – a restoration, or reappropriation of the meaning of childhood for the whole life cycle, and a 'revelation of new modes of being' – new capacities for knowing oneself through exposing ourselves to the 'text' of the child (Kennedy, 2006, p. 19)

This dialectical difficulty is that which the hermeneutics of interpretation theory seeks to work with; where distancing and appropriating are analogous acts of engagement in hermeneutical dialogue: disappropriating the self (adult) in order to let the matter of the child be. By this Ricoeur is suggesting that an essential feature of dialogue (and necessary precondition of interpretation) is its ability to distance the subject from the production of the text so that it can be viewed anew and from different perspectives. It is in the moment that the text becomes distant, that its dialectical counterpart of appropriation comes into play. It is in the act of appropriation (keeping the text close) that we respond:

> To appropriate is to make what is alien one's own. What is appropriated is indeed the matter of text. But the matter of the text becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to let the matter of the text be (Ricoeur, 1991, p.37).

In this way, then, meaning is passed along, rather than construed or constructed. Meaning passes from one idea to another and allows for a new semantic possibility. Ricoeur's dialectic is a refusal of finality, an infinite play between self and other: between child and adult/family/community/culture/history, etc. This

hermeneutic is particularly relevant to the adult-child relation because it denies the possibility of objectivity exemplified in modernist theorising. And here the child is a being *being*. The fundamental question that Ricoeur asks in his discussion of narrative identity is the question, *who am I*? Integral to Ricoeur's narrative self is the idea that self cannot be segregated from the social nexus in which self figures, that is, there is no entity called self. Rather, the self is a mediated entity: part of an intersubjective praxis and active appropriation of the cultural environment.

By way of narrative, then, texts such as the curriculum and policy texts can be revealed as emphasising particular intentions and actions and can thus be seen as instruments that shape and guide people to perform in particular ways and they can also reveal sites of resistance and creative imagination.

To determine the identity of an individual or a community is to answer the question, 'Who did this?' Ricoeur insists that *who* is first and foremost a responding to the *other* (OA). Accordingly the most important evaluation is one's responsiveness to others. The responsibility for an action presupposes the capability of an agent to communicate, to enter into a dialogue with others and to give a response to the question *Who did this*? Asking *who* requires one to consider the humanity of the *other* before one's self. One makes sense of one's self only in and through involvement with others. Ricoeur's hermeneutic neither privatizes nor co-opts the other's experience rather it recognises a small window of opportunity where two worlds may not necessarily agree but can mutually co-exist opening a text away from its author and toward the world it discloses.

Our early childhood curriculum is testimony to this: built on an emerging social and cultural milieu it created a network of new semantic possibilities. The strong social fibre of the early childhood community though its curriculum practices are developing an ongoing process of dialogical, non-prescriptive curriculum making: ever-emerging and creating itself. In this way, the historical horizon of *Te Whāriki* – in some ways a protest document based on whakamana and tino rangatiratanga – has provided moving canvases upon which a narrative approach to planning, teaching, learning and assessment in early childhood has developed. In particular, based on a Vygotskian sociocultural theory (Carr, 2001); and in the attendant calls to view children through multiple lenses:

> that focuses on the relationship between the learner and the environment, and seeks ways to define and document complex reciprocal and responsive relationships in that environment (Carr, 2001, p. 5)

Conclusion

So who is the child of early childhood? In the hopes of a number of critical-political educators she /he is '...a child of infinite capacities, a child born with a hundred languages; building a new pedagogical project, foregrounding relationships and encounters, dialogue and negotiation, reflection and critical thinking; border crossing disciplines and perspectives, replacing either/or positions with an and/also openness...' (Dahlberg, et.al., 1999, p. 122).

The idea that the child-as-narrative is a commitment to the embodied interconnectedness of text involved in a reciprocal, ethical engagement of self with other, reveals itself in the ideas of multiplicity and storytelling. A child-as-narrative concept is important to keep close: through story – imagining and reimagining we keep play infinite semantic differences and creativities. This invokes a system of education where the child is a participant, not an object, of social reproduction. In such a place, the child's project would be to master the world through play, or 'playfully'. The child is seen as genius – the self-actualised artist – already being. Thus the centre/school is the space of play and creativity, where new cultural forms of negotiation are tried out: a form of education based on dialogue, such as the oft-cited schools of Reggio Emilia where the community-teacher-child partnerships are organised around the notion of the adult-child collective where mutual transformation and intergenerational reconstruction through project- and inquiry-based learning takes place. For example, in David Kennedy's formulation, school would become the cultural

'between' of the dialogical relation, the space of difference analogous to the artist's studio. It is the 'space where life and art meet in the interests of individual, cultural and social transformation' (p. 96).

The child-adult relation is a determining factor in a teaching practice based on dialogue where the boundaries between the child-subject/adult-subject are blurred, ensuring that the teacher becomes a hermeneut of childhood who engages in dialogue with her own personhood, with the persons of children, and the culture of childhood in its current historical form. Ricoeur's intersubject signals the end of the discrete, individualised self. Instead, the narrative of the intersubject proposes a dialectical movement where the child and adult are in a continual process of boundary crossing and continuous dialectical transformation. This approach points us toward openings, new possibilities, multiple borders, and habitation of interstitial spaces, where the multiplicities of new spaces for different conceptions of conduct, education and care for self and others may emerge.

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