

# Getting Beyond Quality: Why and How

**Peter Moss**

**Thomas Coram Research Unit**

**[www.ioe.ac.uk](http://www.ioe.ac.uk)**

# Material framework for a strong system of Early Childhood Education & Care

- **Integrated system from 0 to 5/6: sole responsibility of one ministry**
- **Universal entitlement from 12 months: well paid parental leave before**
- **Valued workforce: 60%+ graduates, pay parity with school teachers**
- **Adequate public funding: 1.5-2% of GDP**

**Material framework provides conditions for individual services to practice democratic participation and respect for diversity**

# Contents

**The Problem with Quality**

**Broadening and Deepening my  
Understanding of Quality**

**Getting Beyond Quality**

**Issues of Inclusion and Equity**

## The problem with quality

- **Overuse makes ‘quality’ meaningless**
- **How can ‘quality’ include diversity (of context, perspective, values)? Can you have different, relative definitions of quality?**

## Broadening and deepening my understanding

### **Recognising and valuing multiple perspectives and border crossing:**

- **Paradigms**
- **Theories**
- **Disciplines**
- **Places**

## Paradigms

### Ways of seeing and relating to the world

**“An overarching system of ideas, values and beliefs by which people see and organize the world in a coherent way, a mindset for making sense of the world and our place in it...None of us can step outside of paradigm. But we can be aware of its effect and choose in which paradigm to situate ourselves.”**

# Theories

***Michel Foucault*** – power relations, including power and knowledge; the politics of truth

***Jacques Derrida*** – critique of dualistic and essentialist thinking

***Emanuel Levinas*** – the ethics of an encounter, respecting otherness, not making the other into the same

***Gilles Deleuze*** – knowledge as a rhizome, desire for connections and for the new and unexpected

Increasingly put to work in ECEC – people are ‘Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies’

## Disciplines

- **History – temporal specificity of concepts and practices (why do we talk so much about quality *today*?)**
- **Political science – crisis and renewal of democracy**
- **Economics – types of capitalism (e.g. neo-liberalism), globalisation**
- **Social policy – welfare states (e.g. liberal, conservative and social democratic regimes)**

## Places - Reggio Emilia

- **Adopting social constructionist approach: the image of the rich child; the image of the early childhood service as a place of encounter between citizens**
- **Valuing uncertainty, subjectivity and participation**
- **Evaluation as a collective and dialogic process of meaning making**

## Uncertainty as a value

**“[Uncertainty is a] quality that you can offer, not only a limitation. ..*You have to really change your being, to recognise doubt and uncertainty, to recognise your limits as a resource, as a place of encounter, as a quality.* Which means that you accept that you are unfinished, in a state of permanent change, and your identity is in the dialogue.”**

**Carlina Rinaldi: *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia***

## Getting beyond quality

**‘Quality’ is not a neutral and self-evident concept – it has a particular meaning, particular assumptions and values**

**‘Quality’ is a ‘human technology’ – a method for governing and managing people using particular tools**

**‘Quality’ is produced within a particular paradigm (modernity) and a particular historical and cultural context**

## Quality is not neutral

**Quality means: conformity to universal, predetermined and expert-derived norms**

**Quality values: universality, objectivity, certainty, stability, closure**

**Quality assumes: an autonomous observer able to make a decontextualised and objective statement of fact**

**Quality uses: templates to particular settings (rating scales, check lists, standardised procedures)**

# Quality is a (political) choice

**Working with ‘quality’ is a choice, not a necessity**

**‘Quality’ is one ‘language of evaluation’: there are other languages with other meanings, values and assumptions**

# Meaning making

## Another language of evaluation

**“Evaluation as a democratic process of interpretation, a process 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”**

**Gunilla Dahlberg, Peter Moss, Alan Pence: *Beyond Quality in ECEC 2<sup>nd</sup> ed***

# Meaning making

**Produced within paradigm of postmodernity**

**Values: subjectivity, uncertainty, provisionality,  
contextuality, dialogue, democracy**

**Uses pedagogical documentation: tool for participatory  
research, evaluation and co-construction of knowledge**

# The postmodern paradigm

**“Values what the paradigm of modernity finds problematic: complexity and multiplicity, subjectivity and context, provisionality and uncertainty...This paradigm recognises that any phenomenon – early childhood education and care, for example - has multiple meanings, any knowledge is perspectival, all experience is subject to interpretation.”**

**Gunilla Dahlberg & Peter Moss: *Beyond quality to ethics and politics***

# Pedagogical documentation

**“If the tools of quality involve a process of measurement to determine conformity to specification, pedagogical documentation is a process of research that leads to and values provisional and contestable conclusions”**

*Gunilla Dahlberg & Peter Moss: Beyond quality to ethics and politics*

**“Documentation represents an extraordinary tool for dialogue, for exchange, for sharing. For Malaguzzi, it means the possibility to discuss and dialogue ‘everything with everyone’”**

*Alfredo Hoyuelos: Children in Europe 6*

## Meaning making is more inclusive than quality

- **Values multiple perspectives and local knowledges rather than norms and hegemonic truth claims- recognises knowledge as partial, perspectival, provisional**
- **Understands early childhood centre as, first and foremost, a place for democratic political practice; ‘everyone discusses everything’ – a participatory project...**

## ‘For an educational project with participation’

**“Participation is based on the idea that reality is not objective, that culture is a constantly evolving product of society, that individual knowledge is only partial; and that in order to construct a project, especially an educational project, *everyone’s point of view is relevant in dialogue with others*, within a framework of shared values....If we want a school based on participation, we must create spaces, contexts and times when all subjects – children, teachers and parents – can find opportunities to speak and be listened to”**

**(Paolo Cagfliari, Angela Barozzi, Claudia Giudici, Children in Europe 6)**

## Is quality important for equity?

**Meaning making requires demanding conditions - sustained public attention, inclusive services (universal entitlement), a valued workforce: most likely in egalitarian societies**

**Unequal societies have weak ECEC systems: 'quality ECEC' as a managerial solution to a political issue - inequality and its discontents. (Does it work? US is more unequal today than when Headstart was introduced)**

**If early childhood systems are weak, do you need normative regulation ('quality') to ensure common standards for all children?**

## The importance of time

**“Research suggests that professional learning about cultural diversity [is most effective when there is]...extended time for participants to explore cultural diversity principles and pedagogical practices...and for participants to reflect critically”**

**Glenda MacNaughton and Patrick Hughes**

**Meaning making and pedagogical documentation demand time and value critical reflection**

# Many ways of understanding ECEC

**‘Quality early learning and child care programmes,  
delivering predetermined outcomes’**

**‘ECEC systems that support broad learning, participation  
and democracy’ (OECD Starting Strong 2)**

**??????**