

Working with Uncertainty: developing a workforce for a democratic, inclusive and integrated early childhood service

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Starting Strong II

“[The situation of staff and levels of training in ECEC across the countries covered] is mixed, with acceptable professional education standards being recorded in the Nordic countries but only in early education in most other countries...[C]hild care staff in most countries are poorly trained and paid around minimum wage levels. Not surprisingly, staff turnover in the child care sector is high”

Aldo Fortunati

The Education of Young Children as a Community Project

[The early childhood worker needs to be] more attentive to *creating possibilities* than pursuing predefined goals... [to be] removed from *the fallacy of certainties*, [assuming instead] responsibility to choose, experiment, discuss, reflect and change, focusing on the organisation of opportunities rather than the *anxiety of pursuing outcomes*, and maintaining in her work *the pleasure of amazement and wonder.*”

Themes

Consider

- Material conditions and structures of the early childhood workforce
- Understandings (images) of the worker and her work

In the context of ECEC systems and how we understand early childhood institutions (nurseries, nursery schools, kindergartens etc.)

Gender important – but not a theme today

ECEC systems

The historical legacy

- *Split systems* : childcare // early education
- *Split thinking*: childcare - private commodity for working parents // early education-universal public good
- *Split structures*:
 - Ministries
 - Provision
 - Funding
 - Workforce

The move to more integrated ECEC systems

Education Ministries responsible for *all* 0-6

ECEC services : Brazil, England, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden

**BUT VARY IN HOW FAR INTEGRATION
HAS GONE**

Welfare Ministries responsible for all 0-6 ECEC
services: Denmark, Finland

ECEC provision

Often split between ‘childcare services’ and ‘nursery schools/kindergartens’

Understandings of ‘childcare services’:

- Substitute home
- Commodity on sale to consumers (‘childcare for working parents’)
- Technology producing predetermined and normative outcomes – first and foremost, a place of technical practice

ECEC workforce

Often split between ‘teachers’ and ‘childcare workers’
(still in England after all ECEC services in education)

‘Childcare workers’: low level education and poor pay
and conditions (in England, teachers are graduates
and earn nearly three times as much)

Understandings of the childcare worker:

- Moving from substitute mother ►► low level technician
(applying technologies in prescribed way to achieve
predetermined outcomes – the ‘quality’ model)

Why are childcare workers in this position?

Work devalued:

- Age group is immature
- ‘Care work’ only requires innate female qualities and domestic experience

‘Childcare’ services as private commodity:

- Funding for salaries depends on consumers (parents) who cannot afford to pay more

Why?

Paradigm: the invisible issue

- an overarching system of ideas, values and beliefs by which people see and organize the world in a coherent way
- childcare services situated in particular paradigm - positivistic/modernistic

Paradigm

Values: certainty and mastery, linearity and *predetermined* outcomes, objectivity and universality

Belief in

- ability of science to reveal the true nature of a real world
- one right answer for every question

Technicians can be trained in right answers

Future directions

Incremental change, tackling none of the basic problems

- Continue with split workforce
- Gradual and modest improvement in ‘childcare’ qualifications (e.g. England ►► graduate leadership in nurseries by 2015)

But there are other possibilities...

Future directions

The case for a different direction

- Equality: why should young children get less? Why should female workforce be devalued?
- Quality: “A strong link exists between the training and support of staff – including appropriate pay and conditions – and the quality of ECEC services”
(OECD *Starting Strong II*)
- The work demands it: new understandings require different education and structures

New understandings

Early childhood institution as a place of:

- encounter, interaction and connections among citizens in a community;
- many possibilities – social, cultural, economic, aesthetic, ethical etc.; some possibilities predetermined, but others new and surprising (“pleasure of amazement and wonder”);
- ethical and democratic political practice

Early childhood worker

Early childhood worker understood as a:

- critical thinking and researcher;
- co-constructor of meaning, identity and values
– always in relation with others
- creator of possibilities -“focusing on the organisation of opportunities rather than the anxiety of pursuing outcomes”
- democratic and reflective professional

Early childhood worker as democratic professional

Values/qualities

- Dialogic and democratic
- Researching
- Listening, openness to otherness
- Uncertainty and provisionality
- Subjectivity
- Border crossing and curious
- Multiple perspectives

Dialogic

“[Dialogue] is of absolute importance. It is an idea of dialogue not as an exchange but as *a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result*. And it goes to infinity, it goes to the universe, you can get lost. And for human beings nowadays, and for women particularly, to get lost is a possibility and a risk”

Carlina Rinaldi: *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*

Democratic

- Dialogue and confront
- Recognise own knowledge as partial, perspectival, provisional
- Use ‘democratic’ tools, e.g. pedagogical documentation for participatory evaluation
- Critical thinker: question dominant discourses, the taken-for-granted

Critical thinking

“[I]ntroducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable: to stand against the current of received wisdom. It is a matter of introducing a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one’s experience, of *interrupting the fluency of the narratives that encode that experience and making them stutter*”

Nikolas Rose: *Powers of Freedom*

Researching

“Research can and should take place as much in the classroom and by teachers as in the university and by ‘academics’...The word ‘research’, in this sense, leaves – or rather, demands to come out of – the scientific laboratories, thus ceasing to be a privilege of the few (in universities and other designated places) *to become the stance, the attitude with which teachers approach the sense and meaning of life*”

Carlina Rinaldi: *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*

Listening, openness to otherness

An ethical relationship of openness to the Other...not grasping the Other, treating the Other as the Same

“Putting everything which one encounters into pre-made categories implies that we make the Other into the Same, as everything which does not fit into these categories, which is unfamiliar has to be overcome...*To think an other whom I cannot grasp is an important shift and it challenges the whole scene of pedagogy*”

Gunilla Dahlberg: *Pedagogy as a loci of an ethics of an encounter*

Uncertainty

“[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*

Subjectivity

“Point of view is always subjective, and observation is always partial. But this is a strength, not a limitation. *We are sometimes frightened by subjectivity because it means assuming responsibility. So our search for objectivity is often driven by the fear of taking on responsibility.* There is no adult point of the view, then, which is objective with respect to the child”

Carlina Rinaldi: *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*

Border crossing, curious

“We must think of the preschool teacher as a person who is part of contemporary culture, who is able to question and to analyze this culture with a critical eye...An intellectually curious person who rejects a passive approach to knowledge and prefers to construct knowledge together with others rather than simply to ‘consume’ it.”

Carlina Rinaldi: *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*

Multiple perspectives

Recognise importance of paradigm – different paradigms ►► different perspectives

Increasing ECEC research and practice within ‘postmodern’ paradigm

But paradigm invisible in policy and (most) education

Recognise need to decide which paradigm to choose...but also need to respect and dialogue with those choosing other paradigmatic position

‘Postmodern’ paradigm

“[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*

Structures and conditions

Democratic, inclusive and integrated EC service

Split systems are historical anachronisms:
dysfunctional, divisive and outdated

Integrated 0-6 EC system:

- A child's entitlement (from 12 months)
- Multi-purpose services
- Integrative concept (e.g. 'education in its broadest sense')
- Integrated structures (incl. provision, funding, workforce)

Structures and conditions

Integrated workforce for integrated ECEC

Workforce restructured around a core 0-6
graduate profession=50%+ of workforce

Options for profession include:

- *Early years teacher*: New Zealand (▶▶ 100% by 2012); Sweden (50%)

or

- *Pedagogue*: Denmark (50-60%)

Structures and conditions

Strong education, equal pay

- Graduate-level basic education
- Continuous professional development, e.g.
 - Pedagogical documentation
 - Pedagogical support (pedagogistas)
 - Higher degrees
 - Formal research
- Pay parity with school teachers

Pedagogical documentation

Practice and learning processes:

- made visible
- subject to dialogue, reflection, interpretation – co-constructing meaning
- for evaluation, researching, planning, CPD

“An extraordinary tool for dialogue, for exchange, for sharing. For Malaguzzi it means the possibility to discuss and to dialogue ‘everything with everyone’ ...being able to discuss real, concrete things – not just theories or words”

Alfredo Hoyuelos; *Children in Europe 6*

Structures and conditions

Adequate public funding

Well qualified workforce requires sustained public funding of services – not possible via parental fees and demand subsidies

Public expenditure on ECEC services:

Denmark=2% of GDP; Sweden=1.7%

US=0.4%, Canada=0.3%

OECD: *Starting Strong 2*

In conclusion

Get beyond split thinking and split structures

Beyond ‘childcare’ and ‘early education’ to an integrative concept – pedagogy or education (in its broadest sense)

Beyond divisive provision to inclusive children’s centres

Beyond split funding and split workforce to an integrated funding system and workforce based on a democratic, reflective professional

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