

The OECD and the Notion of Expert in Early Childhood Education and Care: A play

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Abstract: *This manuscript is an academic play about how differing discourses are at work related to public policy. The critical performance reveals clashes of opinion and epistemological dissonance. By transgressing normalised academic text production and instead inserting a postmodern pastiche, the play dramatizes a poly-vocal deconstruction of the concept of expert. The authorial voice of a commissioned report writer and selected voices of early childhood educators who reconceptualise the field are at odds. The play is a document of the recent past that paraphrases words of actual people and can be read as an historical construction of early childhood policy and critical issues.*

A two day face-to-face workshop was held in Oslo Norway, June 2002. Present were 37 administrators and bureaucrats for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), representing 15 nations involved in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This textual presentation is a play on the paper presented by a developmental psychologist positioned as expert (Leseman, 2002), and what happens when he, in my imagination based on my academic reading, meets with other authors. The nations represented at the workshop were Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and France. The paper played upon was presented in advance to the participants on a Norwegian website. After the conference its revised version was made available internationally on www.oecd.org/els/education/review. It is this version which I now paraphrase to meet ethical requirements for publishing.

Exposition of text

What I write now as a play is scripted so that particular viewpoints come through what its characters present to their audience. For the characters in the play I have made up the lines I imagine key people might say should they meet face to face in situations of potential dialogue. These characters, or actors, are based on published authors, whose listed work appears in my reference list. To write their 'lines' I have paraphrased what they have published and done some creative writing. I have then juxtaposed the *dramatis personae* with each other

so that clashes of opinion and epistemological dissonance can be seen. In these ways my play contributes to critical analysis of public policy.

As a postmodern textual device this juxtapositioning functions in ways related to those texts that play with format to present a multi-voiced text by using vertical columns or horizontal binaries between main text and subtext (eg Derrida and Bennington, 1993; Lather and Smithies, 1997). In such postmodern writings what is transgressed are normalised ways of presenting academic positions, and even what is now becoming accepted in some research cultures as deconstructions or discourse analysis. My intention with this play is to highlight contradictory ideas within a conversation. These can then be opened up (by readers of the play) as discussion points for analysis, critique and deconstruction.

By breaking some textual rules of research publication I hope to show other ways of reading what is set up in the name of early childhood education's international policy development. I have called the genre of what I present a play. Not only do I play with how texts can work in postmodernity; I also make a pun of a key theme of much early childhood practice and the accepted rhetoric of 'what must be known as good practice'. Knowing about play is by my writing of a play (as imagined and scripted drama for performance and audience) now seen as something else. The constant removal of meaning, and the ownership or interpretation of what meanings are, is thus deferred as a practice of *différance* (after Derrida, 1988).

In my play a key speaker at an international meeting of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development meets representatives of an international network known as Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education. For this I take responsibility, as the script-writer who paraphrases and re-writes what people have said in publications or on www. My art of writing here is the crafting of a play following my experiences of such texts and their functions. Epistemologically, what follows was constructed after I made field notes at the time of the event I was invited to attend. Attending a two day event does not make me an ethnographer, although I have earlier experience of ethnography (Rhedding-Jones, 1996a; 1996b; 2000). The play that I have now written makes little use of these fieldnotes, though they were a necessary intellectual step towards my process of writing the play. I would say that what I am doing now, methodologically, is bricolage. This I see as about 'using bricks to make another building' (Rhedding-Jones, 2005, 123; 2007, 218-219).

Thus my play is made up of ideas published by selected academics in early childhood education. So that sources can be accessed I give names, dates and pages for the words I paraphrase and from which I write. This is not then the usual scripting of a play, as I am aiming to cross over generic borders to produce

something useful because of its difference. Under copyright rules I can not fill my play with too many direct quotes, but must instead paraphrase the words of the authors named in my reference list. Because I have used a degree of freedom in paraphrasing and creatively working with script, I am not (in my play) using the real names of the published authors informing my play when they become *dramatis personae*. Instead they here have other first names and no surname. Thus they represent not themselves but others like them.

Reading a play (as opposed to hearing and seeing it performed) requires readers who read between the lines of actors or characters. This reading between the lines becomes a reader's own deconstruction of the text, following poststructural theory. A play thus requests a different academic reading. Alternatively it could be performed by an embodied group of graduate students or critical theorists who are open to postmodern literary practices. This could become another deconstruction of early childhood's normalisations of play, as a discursively different focusing on speaker-actors and how we learn to say and write the words we do. Because this is postmodern writing I set the physical scenes for the acts, in my imagination. Also, it should be noted that irony is a feature of postmodernity.

Exposition of *content*

There is quite often a schism between who works in universities with the teaching, supervision and examining of higher degrees for early childhood, and who produces public policy. The location of research can thus be a result of these two categories of professional activities not meeting. Hence the research commissioned by public institutions represents a binary split between this and what is produced as research by theorizing and politically critical researchers employed in universities, and who spend much of their time teaching and mentoring early childhood professionals.

A critical issue here is positivism and the security of fixedness (Rhedding-Jones, 2005; 2007). In naming my writing of this paper 'The OECD and the notion of expert in ECEC' I use the word 'expert' to indicate the critical issue of positivism and its opposite. The characters in my play are not the persons who attended this two day workshop, except for the keynote speaker, who is scripted in as the writer of publically available OECD papers. I am not now focusing on who said what at this two day workshop; nor have I named the country representatives and their academic publications (or lack of these) in internationally refereed journals and edited books of academic scholarship.

In addition to the key speaker at the workshop the other characters in the play are a hovering collection of published academics who were not invited but whose words and ideas nevertheless got into my head as I attended the event. Afterwards I attempted to make sense of my own complex positioning and my inability to speak at the time. The play thus represents and problematises my 'afterwards'. Here a key thinker whose work informs my critiques is Michel Foucault (1979a; b; c; d). In these 1979 publications Foucault focuses on power, truth and strategy. By naming and paraphrasing currently publishing authors following him and whose work currently reconceptualizes early childhood education (Sue Grieshaber, Gail Boldt, Gaile Cannella, Bernadette Baker) my play points to some Foucault effects for our time and our place: namely twenty first century early childhood education and critical analysis of public policy. Said bluntly, this is about who gets to say what and where.

Before launching into the play, I present more contextual information. The workshop event was organised by the Norwegian government's Royal Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (*Det kongelige barne- og familiedepartement*) in collaboration with the OECD's Early Childhood Education and Care representatives based in Paris France. Attending the workshop for the two full days were the national coordinators, directors, senior planning officers, policy makers, ministry of education representatives, child research representatives, administrators and senior advisers of ECEC from Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. We met in an Oslo hotel's conference room and dining room, after an introductory meeting in the City Hall (*Oslo Rådhus*) with its gorgeous view of the fjord in the heart of the city. There were forty-six of us. Included in the two days was our division into small groups, so each group could be mini-bussed to a different day care centre, to briefly see and hear for ourselves what is happening with the very young in institutionalised care and pedagogy.

The selected very young whom we saw and heard were in pre-school day care centres (*barnehager*) in parts of Oslo where there are less white middle-class children than is usual. This selection was because the focus of our two days was on 'early childhood education and care for bilingual children and for children from low-income backgrounds.' The focus relates to the publication *Starting Strong*, which is available for purchase from the internet. Also on the internet was the paper presented as the plenary presentation for our two days <http://odin.dep.no/bfd/engelsk/topics>. It is this paper's final revision that is central to what I present now as a play. Because this is history now (it happened five years ago) it should be remembered that the practices and stances taken in 2002 are not necessarily what is happening now. As an historical construction of early childhood policy and critical issues, the play is a kind of document of the

recent past. Since then even the Norwegian Ministry has changed its name; and many of us publish and act quite differently from how we did earlier.

ACT ONE

The location is a foreign conference room, with empty seats for key speakers facing an audience. The topic, at first, is gender. It then shifts to education and care more generally.

Enter Peter and Sandra, stage right and stage left. They both begin talking aloud immediately, to the audience, whilst one reads aloud the other mouths words unheard and unwritten. The two voices, as two monologues, follow swiftly, without a break. Paul is the 'expert' commissioned to present a report for the OECD. Sandra is the 'expert' who edits an international refereed journal and publishes prolifically in cutting edge locations. Page references here are based on Leseman (2003; 4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 15, 17, 21) and Grieshaber (2001; 224, 225, 226, 227, 230, 231, 236, 255, 256).

Sandra I'm concerned about the ways boys' and girls' lives are so gendered. So I focus on processes and relationships making this happen.

Peter I'm focusing on the growing labour force participation of women in many countries. We're reviewing systems of early childhood care and education and looking at how existing systems are forced to expand their capacity and to extend their services. So women are coming into this as part of the labour force. We can write this statistically.

S Men and women do gender as they construct their activities and practices. What matters is how we become the women and men we are, and how we might be able to do things differently - so focusing on girls and boys matters here.

P Child-focused strategies and activities are directed towards the child. His or her parents are stakeholders. We either target them for instrumental purposes or we don't. Research studies have found that boys showed greater cognitive gains in a child-centred developmental programme, whereas girls profited more from a didactic approach. Other research however, into interaction effects of programme type and gender, regarding the developmental and the didactic, did not find moderating effects of gender on results.

S In my research about gendered situations between mothers and their children I show how a mother, without knowing she did it, positioned her young son to take up a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. This discourse is about how men collectively get privilege over women, and how boys learn to do this quite early.

What this mother does, I'll call her Marg, is also detrimental to her own position as a mother and woman.

P We research whether early, intensive, long-day-care leads to the externalisation of negative, aggressive behaviour in young children. Moreover, we are suspicious of far-reaching conclusions based on a single study conducted in a particular social and cultural context. Our research paradigms ensure accuracy and our views of behaviour are framed by behaviourist psychology.

S Foucault's theoretical concept of governance and governmentality provides a theoretical frame for my research.

P Thirty years ago leading psychologists argued that the genetic-biological nature of cognitive competence precluded any major lasting improvements in this area by pre-school programmes. This was in response to the disappointing results of the first nation-wide evaluation of Head Start programmes in USA.

S Governance is about ways of reflecting and acting that aim to shape, guide, manage, or regulate the conduct and ways of reasoning embedded in institutions, groups and individuals. Foucault saw governmentality as a blurring of boundaries between society and self. Governance and governmentality are two key concepts I work with.

P Key words for research are the individual, relevant stimuli, emotion-motivation, and perceptual-attentional mechanisms. These come together as what regulates the emotion-motivation of an individual by being alert to relevant stimuli. Here researchers show that the individual selectively attends to stimuli by shifting attention from one to another stimulus.

S There is governance of others and governance of oneself. This is what Foucault called governmentalities. He wrote about who should govern and towards what end. As effects of his publishing many of us are now researching what was not researched earlier, because we have other agendas. We see research as not what it was, and its purposes now as something else.

P Our research, with its emphasis on early years' sensitive responsive care-giving, locates practices of prompt reaction to signals of emotional distress and to signals of bio-psychological needs. This regards secure attachment between child and caregiver. We present working models of relationships that promote co-operation, affiliation and trust.

S After Foucault, governmentalities are results of complex circulating discourses. These operate at global, national, and local levels and are filtered through different texts, regulations and policies, the media, and statistics. They

get to be seen as authoritative knowledge, as social scientific expertise, as appropriately educational, and as useful for national pedagogical reforms. We parents, teachers and children come to reflect and reason even our own most private thoughts. This is how self-governance works.

P Our approach is always research based. We ask: What is, or can be, the role of Early Childhood Education and Care in improving social integration? Having asked this question we then proceed to find out our answer. In 12 OECD countries the OECD report of 2001 details recent changes, names and describes systems and national policies, and reveals challenges and solutions. All of this is done with careful and accurate research so that findings are correct and conclusions can be accurately drawn by governments investing their national expenditures.

S Through governmentality, institutional practices become accepted as normal and natural behaviour young children and their parents. But behaviour itself is a word from behaviourist psychology, as is motivation and reinforcement. What would happen if we rejected the discourse governing the uses of these words? Are there other words we could be using instead? Who am I talking about when I say ‘we’ here? I am not meaning ‘we psychologists’.

The characters exit on opposite sides of the stage, the same sides from which they entered.

INTERLUDE

Enter two persons bearing large trays attached to their bodies with halter-neck sashes. From the trays the audience may obtain free of charge popcorn, peanuts and paper-wrapped sweets. They do so and begin to eat. What gets eaten is a metaphor for what gets said. We decide what we will have and what we will not, or what we will produce ourselves instead.

ACT TWO

Scene one

Around a coffee table in a staff room. The topic is at first policy makers, then psychology. After that it shifts to what a concept is. Coffee making facilities upstage right, door downstage left. Several persons are sitting in relaxed fashion, occasionally looking up from what they are reading (and scribbling on or rubbing out) to read aloud. Sometimes they talk to each other. They occasionally go and find a pencil or eraser, walk across the room or look out the window. From there they can see young children at play, and the audience hears these throughout. Page references are based here on Boldt, (2001; 123), Cannella (2001; 16, 17), Tait (2000; 231-232).

Ginny Theory, policy, and practice should not be seen as separate. Instead policy-makers, practitioners and researchers should listen to each other's words and experiences.

Gerald It's the psy-disciplines that worry me. Such a hold psychology has, and it has colonised so much else, pedagogy for example. We should really look at custom-driven culture and how this connects to the psy-disciplines and forms of governance.

Carol Yes and even the language of experts like psychologists and educators get connected like this, as educators take up the ways of talking that psychologists have. Psychology was the vehicle for nineteenth-century applications of positivist assumptions being applied to human beings. Then young children were not just psychologized but biologized. That's how twentieth century got developmental psychology, by mixing cognition with biology and normalisation. The question is: What's going to happen now?

Molly To answer that we have to think about concepts, which positivist researchers don't usually name because they see them as so accepted they don't have to talk about them. What needs to be conceptualised? Childhood or change? And then, how do we get people to be critical, and how do we contest what is so accepted? In my research I'm trying to interrupt dominant images through teaching and advocacy. This is what my research *is*. It's an ethical view of research really.

Scene Two

Inside an elevator. The topic is Foucault and the lack of Foucault. The elevator is in constant slow motion, travelling both up and down, without persons entering or leaving it. The two characters are inside the elevator. They speak not to each other but to the left and right walls of the elevator, though they are facing each other. Page references are based on Baker (2001a, 158; 2001b, 292, 293, 294, 298) and Leseman (2003; 4, 13, 15, 17, 18,19, 25, 37.).

Bobby Foucault suggested cutting off the King's head. Who is the king when it comes to telling governments what to do with their money and policies? Who is the king when *graduate* students have their dissertations assessed? If we look for the kings we are looking for how power has a series of effects, and it operates in local and specific sites, as everyday institutional practices. If we see techniques, strategies and tactics that enable productive and repressive moments, we can research power's circulation. We can do this to research critical analysis of public policy, amongst other things.

Peter As a public document the OECD website is available for all to read and make use of. There is information there about parental choice, socio-economic attributes and ethnic attributes. Parental decisions are the final link in a chain of factors leading to utilisation of ECEC provision. Alternatively some parents decide to care for the child at home.

B Foucault wrote of power as technologies of seeing. What we see and what we do not see are thus critical issues. The practical arts and skills, *which* are technologies, make us seeing or blind.

P Early childhood is a sensitive period marked by both high and low degrees of adaptability or vulnerability of the developing child. The child responds to the stimulation and stresses of his or her environment. A recent uncertainty has arisen concerning the impact of changes in traditional child-rearing patterns on the cognitive and social-emotional development of the young.

B Foucault himself, in his published writings and seminar presentations, always asked what matters. So if we take up Foucault, as theorizing *researchers*, that is what we do too.

P My own research regards a statistical meta-analysis of *evaluation* studies of centre-based preschool programs. Here 19 methodologically sound studies yielded 67 different experimental-control comparisons on three areas of outcome measures. These included intelligence and non-verbal cognition, language and pre-literacy skills, and social-emotional categories.

B Power can only be seen as power after it happens in particular events at a particular site, when you can say what its effects are. Foucault's notion of power-as-effects functions as a metaphor of spinning. The spinning goes toward local centres, as people there make efforts to decentre structural power.

P Educational priority policies in most countries are based on broad sociological factors or categories, which can be measured. These mutually overlap and inter-correlate, and include country of emigration, family structure including single parenthood, family income-level, social class, region or neighbourhood of residence, poverty, parental educational level, and native language of the parents.

B Following a Foucault analysis of power, children are *positioned* as effects of power, and also as the means to further effects.

P A still unanswered question for research is how parents' cultural child rearing beliefs affect children's development, and their successful *integration* into the

school system. Further research here would be beneficial. A further complicating factor regards the type of first languages and the predominant social-communicative functions they serve in their contexts-of-use. L1 may structurally be closely related to L2, sharing many of the lexical, morphological, syntactic and discourse-organisational structures. Alternatively it may be structurally and linguistically deviating. Although we have experimental evidence of advantages of bilingualism for a number of linguistic and cognitive skills, several studies document that successive bilingualism has a negative effect on L2 development and on school achievement in L2 contexts in general. Often this is in addition to other effects of the home environment.

B A subject, such as a child, learns to move through the language and the surveillance of others. This happens through everyday technologies and actions around subjects. There is always a binary that is both visible and invisible between institutions and practices, movements and gazes. But Foucault *said* we could not identify power with its resistance, and that is a binary too.

P A relatively large part of ethnic minority parents expressed a lack of trust of official non-parental childcare.

ACT THREE

The same foreign conference room as in Act One, with empty seats for key speakers facing an audience. This time the topic is cultural diversity, the named key issue for the OECD workshop and the commissioned OECD paper from which this play has sprung.

Enter Peter and Gita. Page references are based on Leseman (2003; 25, 30, 31, 33, 36, 39, 40) and Mohanty (1990; 197, 198, 200).

Gita I am critical of the white upper-level administrators at our institutions and their reading of the issues of pluralism and racial diversity.

Peter Is it true that the greater the socio-economic and ethnic disadvantage, the greater the benefits? This is the question for our research. We have found a moderating role for outcome domain, with stronger results in the *cognitive* and language domain than in the social-emotional domain. Regarding pedagogical concepts, there are stronger effects for a child who is ethnically disadvantaged following a developmental approach than for a didactic educational program.

G We resist the predominantly managerial class of men and women who frame and hence determine *our* voices and our lives, and sometimes even what we want. Though there are efforts to take up questions of difference and diversity, these efforts should also be subject to rigorous examination because they have

far-reaching implications for the institutionalization of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism itself is not necessarily problematic. What needs to be challenged is its definition in terms of an apolitical, ahistorical cultural pluralism.

P Ethnicity no longer predicted choice patterns when mother characteristics and family structure were controlled. Hence regional supply variation *and* demographic characteristics' overall effect without control for co-variables remains questionable.

G For preschools, schools and higher education for early childhood professionals to conduct themselves as usual, in the face of overwhelming challenges posed by the presence of people of color and obvious difference, is quite shocking. What is happening is that such institutions are enacting policies and programs aimed at accommodation rather than transformation. This happens even if the policies and programs are called integration. The *questions* are: Who is left out of the workforce? Whose language is not heard or seen? And when it comes to research, who is doing it?

P Although research controls are recruited in a nearby community, and occasionally carefully matched with programme participants, there probably was good reason to begin with Head Start in the first and not in the second community. This may explain the differences in the post-intervention social and educational context. The idea that programme effects can be nullified by subsequently adverse conditions fits in well with recent theorizing in developmental psychology and developmental neuroscience and developmental psychology, testifying to the situated and dynamic transactional nature of skills.

G Race and poverty and difference become domesticated, because the problems associated with them get seen in narrow, interpersonal terms. Historical contexts get re-written as psychological ones. And all of this gets framed in the language of a particular kind of research supposed to be the truth, and from this policy makers devise policies. The problem is. How else can useful policy be devised?

P Useful research addresses ethnic differences in ECEC use in the USA. Here American families from African descent use center-based care far more extensively than families from Latin-American descent, with *European-American* families occupying a position in between. To explain the ethnic difference in the type of care used, a large number of preferred characteristics was examined.

The characters exit on opposite sides of the stage, as did the characters in Act One.

EPILOGUE

Seven young people aged four and five enter stage right. They are dressed in full brass band attire, with pill-box hats and chin straps, tailored jackets and stripes down their long-trousered legs. Each carries a small brass wind instrument, cornets and the like. Their woman teacher enters last, with full-size trumpet. Two of the young people are black, all others are white. Some are girls and some are boys. The young people and the teacher commence to sound the instruments simultaneously, so that unlike the melodics, the rhythms are together. No attempt at harmony. Clappings from the audience and a second item follows. The young people and their teacher bow low and exit the stage.

The End

Note

Before compiling the first draft of this play, I showed the OECD paper (Leseman, 2002) to a number of colleagues, teachers and postgraduate students in Early Childhood Education in Norway and asked them if they were reacting to it as I was. They were. An earlier version of this play was presented to the 2003 Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education conference in Arizona, USA. I now re-write it for publication and another audience, and with quotations changed to broad ideas.

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