



Peer-reviewed paper

Disrupting the separation of adult and child worlds: The early childhood teacher as everyday philosopher

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This narrative journey shares our thoughts as educators about the separation of adult and child worlds, multiple identities and influences on how identities are formed. We discuss aspects of our philosophy and pedagogy that have been emerging as a form of learning potentiality and dialogue around practice. So where has this journey been taking us? One recurring theme in our dialogue has come from our discovery that paradoxes related to the concept of democracy are political in nature, but are at the same time pedagogical questions too, because, as the philosopher Foucault has shown, power and knowledge are interrelated and cannot be separated (Olssen, 2006). We see that, at the heart of teachers' discussions about children, there are issues of power and identity formation, especially in respect to scrutinising how their image of the child is socially constructed. The term 'identity' implies a singular form. However, as will be explored in this article, it is through negotiation of multiple identities, personal and professional, that we are enabled to work on 'self'. How this search for 'identities' is enacted is by nature ethical and raises issues of social justice. Social justice, in turn, is essentially concerned with issues of power. We will draw attention to these issues of identity, social justice and power through analysis of narratives from New Zealand practice and pedagogical documentation.

Introduction

We have been challenged by the dialectical nature of the adult-child division. As part of our thinking, we see teachers acknowledging themselves as adults who are critical in provoking conditions for transformation of their 'self'. We believe one way of provoking transformative conditions is engaging in pedagogical documentation (Fleet, Patterson, & Robertson, 2006), and narrative learning stories, as they are framed in relation to the New Zealand context and *Te Whāriki*, which is its curriculum for early childhood education (Bayes, 2006; Carr, 2001). Learning stories provide a fertile space to support both personal and collective wondering about our 'pedagogical life' with children.

Pedagogy that is bound up in discovery and intellectual curiosity assumes a constant search for meaning, understands knowledge as co-constructed, and creates the possibilities for examining provisional theories and understandings and the taken-for-granted beliefs they present us with (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). From an educational perspective, we see the historical binary division into adult and child worlds as a division that needs to be scrutinised, re-examined, deconstructed, unpacked, and talked about again and again. We think that this is especially important for early childhood educators, given the way in which women have been positioned historically, the privileged hold on teachers that theories of development have had, and perceptions held about adults' and children's roles in the mixed history of managed care and supervision services.

The work of French philosopher Michel Foucault has been influential in providing us with foundational ideas to frame related themes in our narrative journey. Foucault offers us a solution to traditional



knowledge and beliefs about power structures. The power question is not a 'what' question, but a 'how' question. Our discussion around the division between adult and child worlds is the expression of this 'how' understanding of power.

Foucault challenges us to think positively about our own constructs of power. If we consider the question from the philosophy of Reggio Emilia...what is your image of the child? Is it an image of a strong and competent child imbued with power, or is it an image of a child who is needy and vulnerable? In the context of these questions, Leila Gandini reminds us that a strong image of the child requires a strong teacher (2008). Carlina Rinaldi makes a positive connection with power when she suggests that teachers retain their adult role by making themselves more vulnerable through the acceptance of mistakes and doubt. She concludes that "this requires a 'powerful' teacher, the only kind of teacher suitable for our equally 'powerful' child" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 125).

Following Foucault's lead, and with attention to critical pedagogy, this moves us to explore the relationship between power and knowledge. Provoking ongoing reflection through dialogue has led us to open up issues of power and knowledge in our practice and theory entanglement. Our intention has been to find ways to unravel and frustrate (Mansfield, 2000) the ever-present relationships of power between adults and children. It is our belief that the relational pedagogical space children inhabit with adults is "saturated and 'pregnant' with what had been, and the potentialities of what [we] might become" (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 111). We understand unequal power in the adult-child relationship as a social justice issue worthy of being unpacked and deconstructed. In this process of unpacking and deconstructing lies the possibility of creating and re-inventing our identities, our new possible selves, adults as well as children. We like Clark's understanding of this social process of knowledge and identity making as 'travel', in which the aim is to allow "our inquiries to travel inward, outward, backward and forward and situated within place" (as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 48-9).

In relation to knowledge and identity formation, Hillevi Lenz Taguchi (2010) situates being with knowing. Identity formation, in this context, is understood as constructed through 'the complex interplay' of power, knowledge and language (Mansfield, 2000, p. 59). Let us look now at a learning story about Siddhu's dancing. It tells of a two-year-old boy's sudden desire to dance when he hears familiar Indian music in his centre. This is a cause for celebration, but there are many other ways this narrative helps illustrate and raise questions around the themes we have introduced. In this story, reference is made to the curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, which is often seen as a living curriculum in early childhood education in New Zealand, rather than as a straightforward regulatory document (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Slavica's story: Siddhu's dancing

It was a very busy morning today. Siddhu had arrived with his mum. He was crying and a little bit upset but soon stopped. Somehow, this is Siddhu's and our 'routine'. Waving out the window with lots of ongoing verbal support helps a lot in settling him in. But today, there was a big surprise for him. After his mum had gone, suddenly, music started playing and Siddhu reacted with all of his senses. Obviously, he was very familiar with this song. But I was not!

I could observe how Fatema, who brought this CD called *Darde Disco* from home, and Siddhu were getting engaged in the conversation about the singer and song until Siddhu started dancing. He seemed to know how to dance to the song very well. The music was playing very loudly but the rest of us could not relate to it. It simply did not have the same meaning for us as it had for Siddhu and Fatema! After the song had finished playing for the first time, Siddhu wanted to play it again and again. Other children were arriving with their parents. It was interesting to observe how, except for parents from India, many other parents had some uncomfortable expressions on their faces walking into the centre in which very loud Indian music was being played. Strangely, I could understand this, as I had felt the same way just a few minutes earlier. I found myself thinking, "How is this going to make us look? What would parents think?"



How would they feel about this music? What is educational in all of this?" Then, whilst all of these questions were zooming through my head, I looked at Siddhu dancing and thoroughly enjoying himself. He looked completely immersed in his dance. His body had turned into a very fast muscle moving and rhythmic feeling machine. His dancing involved moving the whole body while standing, then rolling on the floor doing some special twists, getting up and moving his arms in and out, up and down. It was so fascinating! Sometime later, he would be trying very hard to teach us how to make these moves. I noticed how Fatema did not dance. She was probably not sure how the rest of the team would react.

In a split second, I found answers to my questions. Suddenly, all the dilemmas seemed so clear and simple. After all, *Te Whāriki* talks about, and is about, understanding an individual within the group. It is about the individual's motivation to learn alone and with others based on the individual's interest, with us early childhood educators being there to support them all the way in this process. It is about accepting and understanding the individual for who he/she really is. From this moment, I knew we would be supporting Siddhu's interest to dance to this song every day while his interest was there. And there would be no problem justifying this educationally, as it was clearly part of our curriculum. This song and dance had become a toddler group hymn of the complete acceptance and understanding of 'the other'. For me it also represented a move away from the rhetoric of socio-cultural curriculum to what learning, teaching and leading in a democratic society really meant. It just also happened to become the favourite dancing music for everyone in the toddler group, and was a source of discovering many other children's individual interests and talents.

Slavica's reflection: The third space

I ask myself, whose story is this? I can see how it could be a general 'multi-cultural' dance story that is at the same time Siddhu's individual story. But it is also my story. Or is it all of this at once? "As - the child and I - journey through our educational days, we in turn shape each other and change, creating an 'other', a third space" (Soja, 1996, as cited in Robertson, 2006, p. 39).

What's more, the question of whose story this is helps to point me toward the need to recognise and adopt the multiplicity of things. It also reminds me "the self is not just mind, but also involves the body" (Foucault, as cited in Peters, 1998, p. 46). Building on this, I am challenged by the way in which documentation materialises and represents our situated thinking (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). There are always multiple stories, as well as multiple topics within a story.

My reflection on Siddhu's dancing has had a profound impact on my teaching and personal and professional development. It is a reflection that challenges me to scrutinize taken-for-granted assumptions and understandings offered through our poststructural curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. It has also helped me to see better how curriculum is not what is written but it is what we create or allow ourselves to create out of it. It is always in the making!

Janet Robertson (2006, p. 38) reminds us: "The approach that early childhood education takes in communities often reflects strongly held values within that community". Siddhu's story is about relational pedagogy in which knowing a child well and having a genuine respect for the child/learner is equal to that of knowing and respecting the adult (myself) as learner. Siddhu's story, as it has been written, gives a sense of how new insights were being made about Western culture against the backdrop of 'other' cultures. It reveals how early childhood teachers, as a product of Western culture, can feel insecure in the face of a very genuine and public encounter with a discourse that authentically celebrates different cultural practices and beliefs. Reflecting on what was changing, following this seemingly 'ordinary' event with a new CD, I became very aware of the 'silences', firstly around the child and parent voices, but then in myself and in what was being made material that had previously been taken-for-granted ordinary moments. As Alma Fleet and Catherine Patterson put it:



Problematising the taken-for-granted and drawing attention to the silences lurking under everyday practices can be transformative, particularly in terms of contextualised decision-making. (Fleet & Patterson, 2009, p. 21)

Hearing silences

In the context of Siddhu's story as a learning story, and framed as a third space for reflecting on learning as multi-layered, we ask: what is it that we seek? Like Carlina Rinaldi (2006, pp. 129-30), we think that writing about transformations in one's identity will reveal values at work, and make adults' and children's meaning-making processes more visible. Consider, for a moment, Hillevi Lenz Taguchi's (2010) conception, "What teachers in Reggio Emilia ... have experienced is that there is no border between what the child is and what the child continuously becomes. The child becomes, in a specific sense, what it learns, in a steady ongoing flow of material-discursive events" (p. 39).

This learning story that began with Siddhu's dancing speaks to us about invisible transformations in both the teacher's identity as a supporter of the child's learning, as well as the child's. These shifts are materialised in practice, supporting the idea of "being transformed in our new phenomenon of knowing and becoming with practice, which makes practice real in a new way" (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 88).

Another question might be: what is the 'truth' that *Te Whāriki* is promoting as a socio-cultural curriculum founded on bicultural roots? It will not be a universal notion of absolute truth. It is certainly not the adult and child worlds separated and divided. Is it about the ongoing quest for recognising complexity and authenticity in our multiple teaching identities? Is it cultural, is it political, is it ethical, or is it all of these (Hill & Sansom, 2010)? Is it more about minor politics than major politics, as in respect for the local, the here and now, the everyday, "as the contesting in 'cramped spaces' of dominant discourses subjectification and injustice?" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 150). The curriculum, *Te Whāriki* - as representing intended policy at the national level - can be seen as an example of major or traditional politics providing spaces for democratic minor politics at the level of centres and local practices. In this example, we see a productive relationship between major and minor politics. It cannot be assumed that all centres or teachers take up the call to conduct a critique of praxis (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 156) and the reflective confronting and critical meaning-making this entails. Similarly, there are many agendas in major politics that the democratic work of minor politics finds itself questioning and desiring to disrupt. Pedagogical documentation, "through opening up dialogue and difference, deconstructing and reconstructing discourses" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 158) is an important space for minor politics in the uncovering and revealing of potentialities for ongoing participation and emancipation.

In New Zealand, as pedagogical documentation is taken a step further from stories of children's normalised development and learning, space has been created for a deeper understanding of both the image and identity of the child, and also the image and identity of a teacher. The image of the Aotearoa/New Zealand early childhood teacher is emerging in our narrative, but we are not sure who this teacher is because they is constantly shifting. New Zealand has been unique in that it developed *Te Whāriki* as a bicultural curriculum. Perhaps more so than in some areas of the world, we find a very close relationship between the sense of who we are and our subjectivity, with our understanding of 'culture' and cultural diversity. The bicultural nature of the early childhood curriculum has been, and still is, helpful in creating a sense of cultural diversity as something we naturally 'do' as the citizens of this bicultural and multicultural New Zealand society. Our taken-for-granted assumptions, however, need to be continually re-visited; to be unpacked and taken to deeper levels, in order to know what it entails to understand a person. Making 'the other' visible through cultural days, songs and stories, pictures, language and other ways of representing culture has its place, but does this tell us a story about who this cultural 'other' really is or how the very same 'other' made us change? If it does, what then is this story? How do we know we



have created the space for them to be and to become, and offered a place in our hearts because it is there that our teaching starts?

These are some of the questions we might like to explore in more depth through our stories, accepting that finding 'the' truth is not what we are after. For, is it possible to know one truth, and, if so, whose truth would it be?

The knowledgeable child and the knowledgeable early childhood teacher

We see Siddhu's story as potent with possibilities to uncover, describing not only what we "do with children" (Robertson, 2006, p. 51), but also, through our reflection, what we are thinking and recognising, and how our new teaching identity emerges and changes simultaneously with the child's. This process of meaning-making and knowledge construction about the world and ourselves is cultural, political and ethical in its nature. As a highly reflective process, it enables better understanding of the conditions that shape us.

Being concerned with the 'image of the child' as the backdrop to our practice is something we give the educators from Reggio Emilia credit for. They have helped us to understand that the child's story is our (adult) story too, written to represent: "the recovery of silent voices that may have been lost in enthusiastic quest for grand, general knowledge claims" (Pavlich & Ratner, 1996, p. 149). Contesting the division of life into adult child worlds is at the heart of this discussion. Other lines of separation and division have had their impact on the young child and their experience of care and education. When we think about the early childhood profession in general, it is quite difficult not to use our traditional gaze. A common example is young children and their educators being perceived as less worthy than children in the compulsory school sector and their teachers. The developmental lens accompanying notions of ages and stages also comes to mind whenever it sees children as incomplete, requiring fixing or as empty vessels to be filled. How then do we resist this gaze? Where is the space for the knowledgeable child and the critically knowledgeable early childhood teacher?

It could be argued that the synthesis of these two dialectically opposing worldviews, modern and the postmodern, is symbolically expressed through *Te Whāriki*. Our understanding of the concept of curriculum, however, includes the understanding that teaching, curriculum development and knowledge production are not value free: "no language is politically neutral, and no meaning-making process is objective" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 59). As part of our ongoing narrative journey, we have come to understand *Te Whāriki* as that curricular 'postmodern alternative' that unites "the spiritual, aesthetic, historical, sociopolitical, ethical, racial, gendered, sexual and cultural dimensions of the human community" (Slattery, 2006, p. 287). It is the notion of the individual within the group in *Te Whāriki* that connects it with the educational project of Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi, 2006). Seeing learning stories as potentiality, as part of the process of making pedagogical practice visible, learning stories have the potential to describe the 'child's encounter' in the here and now (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 113). These encounters are expressed through many languages and in activities meaningful to them. Encounters also have the potential to change socially constructed images of children. As we have previously argued, pedagogy should not only be directed towards children and their learning, but also be an important transformative force in our own learning, learning about our own 'self'. This learning is not so much about 'being', but about being that is always 'becoming'. It is our reflective being that leads to action revealing another possible 'self' and impacting on our values and belief systems. It is, in other words, developing one's human agency, a "self-directed disposition and capacity to act on the world" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 59). It is being that continuously builds the capacity to act on the world through self, through actions that are of a cultural, ethical and political nature, and actions that are intellectually engaging.



Beyond documentation: The fish story

The analysis of this next story about Lukasz and his peers' interest in fish involves using the frames of identity, being and becoming, and the exercise of power in the world. We see that this is a story about the transformation of teachers as adults. Children are already open and flexible to multiple interpretations of the world. We focus our analysis on the effects of power, the power-knowledge relationship and identity formation. Following Slavica's reflection and deconstruction of the text in the 'fish story' documentation, the part that technology plays is briefly scrutinised in respect to how it influences learning potentiality and knowledge production.

Slavica's reflection: Teacher's identity in documentation

I continue this narrative journey on from how documentation changed my identity as a teacher, from my documenting and assuming Siddhu's identity and questions about the cultural 'other'. It was a break/rupture in my understanding about how curriculum is not what is written but is what is created.

The story of learning with Lukasz begins...

I started learning about Lukasz's interest in and his understanding about fish almost two months before 'the real fish' experience. We had planted some plants in our empty fish tank. In July, the plants started flowering. I proudly pointed this out to Lukasz, trying to draw his attention to the changing nature of the plants, asking for his opinion. He looked puzzled with the plants in the fish tank. "You should buy some fish and keep them in the fish tank" he suggested, making no comment on my beautiful plants! Obviously he is more interested in animals than plants!

The focus here is not only on Lukasz but also on adults' dispositions for learning. This begs the question: Who is the learner here? Who decides the curriculum and how it is going to be carried out? Who is the leader? Power is present throughout the documentation, but is not explicitly mentioned. This text extract implicitly addresses and situates somewhat more balanced power relations. In some ways, it equalises the child and the adult's right to decide their learning.

The 'requirement' around curriculum being based on a child's interest is clearly identified. (Indeed, there is something of a self-aware chuckle and acceptance of the traditional 'I' as the teacher being pushed to one side little bit, since "*Obviously he is more interested in animals than plants!*")

My interests in what Lukasz was thinking combined with what the learning goals I had set up for him are there too (meaning that there is the possibility of traditional and non-traditional ways of teaching continuously overlapping, and my being in multiple ways). Lukasz is being somewhat traditional too in that he was not too impressed with plants being in a fish tank. Clearly, he knew something was not 'right'. He became more powerful when he went on to reveal his depth of knowledge about fish. Meaning-making is co-constructed through interactions with others. The story continues...

Riya could not resist staying quiet, so she joined in making quite an important point "Better no sharks". Mentioning sharks somehow made Lukasz share with us what he knew about fish. He explained, "Sometimes in the ocean there is light on some fish. The other fish see them and they eat them. Quite scary. That is just a movie about fish".

Resolving my theory/practice and identity entanglement through dialogue with others keeps open reflection on power relationships in our interactions. It gets sparked by questioning: who are these learners; how have they come to know; what is the role of others in these processes?



Riya, who is usually very talkative, has been keeping her distance, on this occasion, listening carefully and staying quiet at the beginning of this event. This part of the sentence *'could not resist staying quiet'* implies my own desire to leave traces of who she is, her dispositions, as well as knowledge, as in the talkative nature of her personality usually evident in her willingness to take part. Her decision to join triggered Lucasz to share his understanding about the fish program he had seen on the Discovery channel, from which I was then able to learn about his fascination with fish. There was also probably some surprise on my face and so Lucasz thought his story scared me. I thought he was worried about me, and that this was what motivated him to comfort me when he said, *"That is just a movie about fish!"* At least these were the things I was thinking and saw as important to leave open as triggers for when the story was revisited by Lukasz, Riya and others at a later point in time. Through this encounter, I experienced that there is no boundary between what the child is and what the child is continuously becoming. I feel it is the same for the teacher. Being the supporter of the learner through recording the encounters is one of the many ways in my own learning. The story goes on...

Sometime in August, I remembered this encounter with Lukasz. It was when both children and teachers, especially Stu, started engaging with a number of fish 'activities'. My shopping duty was due and, because we also cook in the centre, we decided to get a large real fish. The 'we' here are our teaching team. It was exciting to think about what would happen, the sense of unknown endings, and anticipation of many possibilities and learning potentialities.

In the process of making pedagogical practice visible, I had been presented with a surprise. It was as if suddenly the singular had turned into plural, the individual turned into multiple, the teacher turned into teachers, the 'I' within the 'we' still there, but also undoubtedly made stronger by the 'we'. Clearly, pedagogy in our centre had been turning its focus towards adults learning as well as towards children learning. What about its transformative force within ourselves? 'We' as a learning community were emerging in this text, and that had changed everything. The sense of a singular leader leading was no longer there. In its place was evidence of genuinely distributed leadership amongst children and teachers. Perhaps this is a sign of a breaking up with the traditional way of seeing and doing, and, as an expansion of possibility, there was a productive force that represented another 'us in becoming'. Resistance (to the old ways) here was not about opposing or simply replacing one understanding with another. Rather, it was about a continuous process of displacement transformation from within, such resistance being a "professional enactment of ethics of resistance" (Lenz Taguchi, 2008, p. 272).

The fish experience not only provided children with multiple avenues and opportunities to explore through their senses; it also enabled them to work through their feelings of uncertainty and meeting with the unknown. A good example of this occurred with a number of girls having the chance to overcome their fear of touching fish. It is worth noting that was not the case with Olive, as she was one brave girl who was not afraid of anything!

I am reminded that reflection on our own values is the most challenging part of deconstruction. My resistance to the old ways of doing and seeing has been the consequence. Resistance that comes as an ongoing work on oneself materialised here in this sentence, *'multiple avenues and opportunities to explore through their senses, it also enabled them to work through their feelings of uncertainty and meeting with the unknown'*.

Pedagogy, as usual, has been replaced with the notions of uncertainty and surprise at the unknown. Complexity is what I am presented with here! In every new move, my previous understanding is included and displaced at the same time. A good example of this was when my stereotypical belief about girls and fishing had been challenged by their obvious genuine desire to explore real fish.

So, it was time for us to proceed with cooking the fish. Being concerned teachers, we did not want to be late with our routines and meals! When we announced, this Lukasz resisted. There was quite a worried look on his face, and his voice matched this look. He exclaimed, panicking somewhat "No. No. We need



to catch it first". This took me by surprise, as the fish was already dead and I had not thought about this possibility. But... I actually liked this idea. Now... Lukasz was to face the challenge in the form of a question "And how are we going to do that"? I asked, not expecting him to really know. "We just need a line, a hook and the stick, and then the hook needs to go in the fish mouth, like this", he said, opening the fish's mouth.

"In the context of ECE practice... deconstruction is about purposeful disruptions, destabilisations, undermining, and challenges to taken for granted notions, values, practices, and pedagogy-as-usual." (Lenz Taguchi, 2008, p. 272). Here, the awareness of the routines and rules to be followed had been challenged with the need to give time and space for the learning to unfold.

Olive came back with a little yellow block, explaining, "We can try with this" placing the block in the fish's mouth. This was an intriguing development. I was very interested to find out how her 'invention' was going to work. Lukasz realized that this is not enough, as the fishing line was missing, and he announced this. We were then faced with a big problem! Suddenly, Lukasz remembered that there were fishing rods that he and some other children had made with Stu. We managed to find them and Lukasz took the lead again by placing the fishing rod in the fish's mouth. It did not work and he knew why. "There is no hook", he said. We collectively came up with the solution to tie the fishing line around the fish.

As a final thought, deconstruction has disrupted my understanding of leadership and the exercise of power in educational settings. Educational leadership in the construction of curriculum is seen here as distributed across educator and children, as community members taking on both teaching and learning roles. It stretches transversely throughout all dimensions of the task and relational environment that are being explored and persisted with. Curriculum, as it is lived and documented, is a free creation of the many participants, as it is always in the making, new and inspiring, inviting and inclusive, allowing for a child's identity to unfold before our eyes. Listening and documenting is what we, as educator-learners, need to do, so as to be able to find ourselves, too.

Conclusion

This narrative journey shared our thoughts as educators about the separation of adult and child worlds. The binary division of these worlds has been challenged through the discussion of power relations and exploration of our multiple identities. We have found that the notion of the adult early childhood teacher's identity as a learner has been very thought provoking and worthy of our ongoing curiosity.

In this paper, our focus has been on how pedagogical documentation could be used as a transformative tool in early childhood practice through the personal transformation of the practitioners. We have explored the notion of the knowledgeable early childhood teacher as learner and philosopher. We ask you to consider how this notion of the early childhood teacher seeing themselves as the inquisitive philosopher and critically reflective learner can be problematic for traditional education paradigms that underpin the many binary divisions within our world. We have shared how pedagogical documentation can provide spaces for unpacking not only children's learning, but also our own, suggesting that it is possible to create a record of who we are at a particular moment in time. We have tried to show how these processes are fluid, and can be revisited and re-explored through further cycles in the formation of our many identities. In this way, we see our identities as continually emerging, always in flow, and contestable.

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