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INTRODUCTION

Philosophy and Pedagogy of Early Childhood

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Abstract

In recent years new discourses have emerged to inform philosophy and pedagogy in early childhood. These range from various postfoundational perspectives to objectivist accounts such as neuroscience in relation to brain development. Given the variety of competing narratives, the field is complex and multifaceted with potential to revision early childhood pedagogy through varied paradigms and philosophical orientations. This special issue sought scholarship on a range of philosophical perspectives about early childhood education, particularly those related to issues of pedagogy. In this article, we develop an argument for philosophically informed pedagogy to balance some of the psychological and empirical approaches that dominate the field. Based on the provocations of the seven articles that comprise this issue, we argue for greater attention to subjective and even mysterious approaches to learning that call for ontological orientations to pedagogy as a relationship rather than a response or an intervention.

Keywords: pedagogy, philosophy, early childhood education, ontology, teaching

Early Childhood Education and Pedagogy

Early childhood education in a broad sense refers to the theory and practice of educating young children. It incorporates the education of adults about very young children, particularly, but not exclusively, through teacher education, in order that teachers may *know* the best route to learning by calling upon a repertoire of strategies. It is here that pedagogy has taken root. Globally, early childhood education also occupies an important platform for government economic and social policy, and assumes an increasingly formative role in the way the child and family can be conceptualized in contemporary and future society. In these contexts, early years pedagogy is aligned with child-rearing practices that are believed, by well-meaning adults who claim to know what consitutes valued knowledge, to promote desirable outcomes for all. Early

childhood education and the pedagogies that frame its existence are thus often viewed as a 'magic bullet' for social reform in many countries (e.g. OECD, 2006; UNICEF, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2011).

The increasing focus on early childhood as a locus of social administration is reflected in contemporary media about parenting, as well as in increasing scholarship, professionalization, policy and strategic planning, including the development of formalized curricula. Exponential growth in and promotion of early childhood centres, and the formal education of early childhood teachers in many Western societies emphasizes the increasing value and role of early childhood education to families and governments. Hence the focus of philosophy and pedagogy in this special issue: we hope that this issue provides a vehicle for furthering debate, and a means to think critically, reflectively and formatively about the relationship between education, care and very young children in formal educational settings that claim pedagogy as their central quest.

Pedagogy, from *pais* (boy); *agōgos* (leader), literally translates as 'to lead the child' (*Collins English Dictionary,* 2005). Understandings of pedagogy have evolved over time. In ancient Greece, where the term originates, the pedagogue was a lowly figure: a slave who supervised the education of his master's son (Lucas, 1972). Contemporary understandings of pedagogy refer to pedagogy as the art or science (Loughran, 2010) of being a teacher, involving methods and techniques of teaching predicated on two conceptions of pedagogy: the liberal, emphasizing the autonomy of the child; and the conservative, emphasizing the authority of the teacher (see for example, definitions in the Oxford Dictionaries of Sociology and Education; Scott & Marshall, 2009). In line with a liberal conception, contemporary early childhood discourse emphasizes child-centred approaches (as opposed to teacher-directed approaches), and this is reflected in most Western early years curricula and associated teacher practices.

Current conceptual delineations of pedagogy also address the wider scope of educational questions such as: What does it mean to teach? What does it mean to learn? What does it mean to be human? What and whose knowledge is important? Pedagogy, then, makes vital connections between teaching, learning, knowledge, society and politics and generally involves a vision about society, people and knowledge. Vygotsky (1997, p. 348), for example, states that pedagogy 'is never and was never politically indifferent … through its own work on the psyche, it has always adopted a particular social pattern, political line, in accordance with the dominant social class that has guided its interests'. Pedagogy seen in this way, then, refers not only to epistemologies of knowing and doing. It takes on discursive meanings involving a myriad of practices and subjectivities, including those of social administration that work on the child, the family and society.

A Problem of Pedagogy

Western traditions of education inspired by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Dewey and Piaget share a progressive system of education where the child is viewed as naturally developing and an active learner. From this standpoint, a common litany of phrases about how children learn and how best to teach is frequently invoked, such as: learning occurs through play; children have natural inclinations to explore; children should be

encouraged to discover knowledge; the teacher should build on what children already know; the teacher is the guide on the side; and learning should be experiential and concrete. In almost all cases, an instrumental approach is evident in some form or other. A rhetoric of a bygone romantic era is frequently conjured in the promotion of concepts that emphasize the naivety of the child developing individuality through activities such as play.

Curricula and theoretical frameworks attempt to explain these concepts through interpretations of systems, activities, social capital and human motivation (see, for example, the New Zealand and Australian curriculum: *Te Whāriki* [Ministry of Education, 1996]; the *Australian Early Years Learning Framework* [Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009]; Keeley, 2007). In line with these developments, pedagogy, research and policy frequently focuses on constructivist approaches within dyadic human relationships in the education of the very young. Studies that dominate early years journals tend to focus solely on this narrow field of inquiry asserting certainty about what constitutes good pedagogy.

In a quest to ensure that empirical research is beneficial to young children (and, by extrapolation, society) a great deal of attention has been paid to the construction of an evidence base for good practice. Biesta (2007) argues, however, that such an approach assumes an accurate representation of how things are in the world as a kind of cause and effect correlation, ignoring a fuller appreciation of epistemological and ontological nuances that underlie teaching and learning. An inherent danger exists since what can be known rests within the domains of participation and ignores the agency of the child and his or her other capacity to exceed such borders (and perhaps even reside in different realms). Wegerif (2013, p. 82) suggests that this is 'the space of infinite possibility that was there before the boundary was drawn'. In a similar vein, Vandenbroeck, Roets, and Roose (2012) suggest that current privileged methodologies——particularly those isolated from any philosophical critique——do not grant sufficient consideration of the complexity of the issues under investigation where pedagogical encounters are concerned. Such spaces are less measurable yet hold rich potential for understanding pedagogy as a value-based dialogical experience that exceeds quantification alone.

Our concern is not with the known approaches *per se*——indeed, we would argue for their legitimate place within educational scholarship——rather, it is with the limitations of relying on one particular set of theories bound to one philosophical orientation to the exclusion of others. A further concern about the quest for pedagogical certainty is that there is a risk of trivializing and exploiting philosophical orientations. It is therefore important that the sector is informed by pedagogical research *and* critical academic scholarship. It is also important that the sector pays attention to its philosophical origins and engages in furthering philosophical scholarship as new ideas are revealed, revisited or reconceptualized, particularly in teacher education where philosophy and pedagogy keenly intersect. Such emphasis causes some irritation to the current focus on pedagogy as eschatological progression alone, since certain outcomes can no longer be thought of as the ultimate educational quest.

Notwithstanding the work of a growing number of concerned scholars, there is still a continued reliance on positivist empirical research and psychological perspectives in a journey towards knowledge. A recent example can be found in the work of the Effective Pre-school Education (EPPE) project, which positions the initiation and maintenance of instructive processes that effectively lead to educational goals at the heart of pedagogy (Moyles, Adams, & Musgrove, 2002). As a pedagogical imperative, dominant approaches privilege processes of learning that claim to know what young children are thinking, drawing on the work of Piaget, Bandura and Vygotsky[1] and others as key foundations. Described as 'sustained shared thinking', their research priority is to identify outcomes that measure progress on that basis (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002), latterly described in the context of play as 'pedagogic progression' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). These findings have been widely adopted in the UK and beyond (e.g. Meade, Robinson, Stuart, Smorti, & Williamson, 2012) as analytical frameworks for measurement, and build on global scales that are used in evaluation studies (e.g. Harms & Clifford, 1980; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 1998; Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2006; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008) to determine 'quality early childhood education' on the basis of achieved learning outcomes.

We see these unnecessarily narrow approaches as problematic insofar as they tend to dominate the sector, capture the discourse and garner privileged access to government funding. The combined effect is to perpetuate the *status quo*; and construct a particular, perhaps even binding, paradigm readily appropriated by ministries and governments to promote efficiency frameworks of standards, outcomes and policies (Farquhar, 2010). The impact of such exclusive approaches extends to research design, curriculum frameworks and policy initiatives around the world.[2] Because of their philosophical oversimplicity, such frameworks set unhelpful parameters for universal distinctions about what constitutes good learning and, by association in the early years context, good pedagogy.

This article (and indeed each of the articles in this issue) argues for the need to consider and promote diverse pedagogical scholarship in order to expand and perhaps even reconceptualize ways of working with young children and families. This is, of course, not a new call and there is a small but growing scholarship that attempts to broaden or, in some cases, suspend horizons. See, for example, the special issue of *EPAT* on philosophy of early childhood (Farquhar & Fitzsimons, 2007); work of the early childhood reconceptualizers (e.g. Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Cannella, 1997); studies in the new sociology of childhood (e.g. James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Kehily, 2009); recent dialogical research (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Ben-David Kolikant, 2013); as well as scholarship developing out of the work of feminist philosophers Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nel Noddings (2002) in the ethics in pedagogy and care. These and other fields of exploration inform new philosophical and pedagogical directions.

Formosinho and Formosinho (2012) assert that pedagogical knowledge invites different paradigmatic approaches than those of other forms of science. This view is especially poignant in the early years. Recent studies of newborns suggest that learning is relational, even synchronous (Delafield-Butt & Trevarthen, 2013); that it takes place across unbounded spaces that precede the division of adult–child as discreet

entities (Adolph & Kretch, 2012; White, Peter, & Redder, in press) and considers the importance of the body in space (Elwick, Bradley, & Sumsion, 2012). Seen in this light the care versus education divide that structures much of the scholarship in early childhood pedagogy becomes redundant, since it is no longer necessary to partition pedagogy as a cognitive quest involving some sort of transmission from novice to expert. Challenge is also offered to a view of education that is devoid of emotion in some misguided Cartesian split (often unwisely attributed to Vygotsky, among others). Instead, pedagogy can be interpreted as a relational experience that locates emotionality as a co-requisite to learning (e.g. Brownlee & Berthelson, 2007; Rockel, 2009; Taggart, 2011; White, 2012). If we entertain philosophical positions that situate learning outside of the moment, across time and between (visible and invisible) spaces, as this view promotes, a serious critique is offered to privileged approaches that situate learning merely as participation in activity or in isolated cognitive domains. Taken together with contemporary claims from neurological studies suggesting previously unrealized connected approaches between learning and relationships (e.g. Fox, Leavitt, & Nelson, 2010), such critique heralds alternative standpoints to the study of pedagogy in the early years. Several, but by no means all, are explored throughout this issue.

A Philosophical Turn

Any interpretation of pedagogy is intimately bound up with definitions of learning, orientation (whether realized or not) and application in early years contexts. An emphasis on learning as an individual process of social interaction, and imitation of an expert other is clearly upheld within developmental and psychological domains that have a stronghold in contemporary early years scholarship and practice. For example, Vygotsky's Marxist orientation positions learning as a dialectical process that leads the learner into higher psychological thinking and sets the scene for intervention as advancing knowledge: a process that Fleer (2010) describes as 'pedagogical framing'. In this location the developing child is led into a more sophisticated way of thinking in the world. Such thinking, when applied without consideration of creative processes that accompany thought, privileges the logos and supports the view that scientific knowledge is superior to other forms of knowing. Thus, a pedagogical orientation towards ontological forms of being surrenders to knowing as the central tenet of education. It is far removed, even remote, from the Zoe[3] (metaphorical and real) we read about in White's article (this issue), who argues that infants have their own life-force or agency outside of adult intervention and that there is much they might teach adults. In this we are reminded of Wordsworth's romantic contention in *Intimations of immortality from recollections of early childhood* that childhood is a unique and magical experience that is often misunderstood by well-meaning adults:

> It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
>
> Turn wheresoe'er I may,
>
> By night or day,

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

(Wordsworth, 1843)

Given the philosophical emphasis of this journal it is hardly surprising that the articles in this issue represent a departure from dominant narratives of early childhood education and further develop an understanding of the importance of philosophy of education and the young child. These align and greatly expand on philosophical shifts in approaches to teaching and learning——heralded in previous *EPAT* articles that locate pedagogy across private and public space (Lewis, 2012); in and outside of traditional forms of constructivism (Peterson, 2012); beyond instrumental imperatives (Taatila & Raij, 2012) and beyond dominant paradigms (Moss, 2007). In these locales, pedagogy might be viewed as more relational: democratically oriented, as De Lissovoy (2010) suggests, towards what is held in common (and, from a dialogical standpoint, what is not). Emphasis is also given to perception, disaffect (Peters, 2012), dialogue and wonder (White, 2011), and 'unconsciousness' as a pedagogical state (Semetsky & Delpech-Ramey, 2012) for learners and teachers alike. This attention to the subjective and intersubjective nature of pedagogy is keenly felt in early years philosophy and practice, juxtaposed with the importance of the discursive, spatial, embodied and unknowable nature of early childhood experience. Early childhood education is thus not merely concerned with developmentally discrete learners (such as 'preschoolers', 'toddlers' or 'infants'). Rather it encompasses those who do not necessarily share the same semiotic approaches and therefore requires a sophisticated engagement within the wider world beyond the immediate contexts and subtexts that determine its value. It encompasses those who do not necessarily share the same semiotic approaches——older peers, adults, their families——and requires a sophisticated engagement within the wider world beyond the immediate context and authoritative regimes of accountability. Each author in this issue asserts, in one way or another, that pedagogy in the early years claims its most prominent and challenging position in such conceptualizations and, in doing so, responds to what is now being unproblematically described as a 'new normality' (Carroll-Lind & Angus, 2011) for the very young in contemporary society.

Challenges to an exclusive knowing approach to pedagogy are echoed throughout the pages of this journal. In this era of pedagogical certainty and on the cusp of standards-based agendas, such critical and philosophical inquiry is a welcome antidote. As the authors suggest in many and varied ways, the pedagogical alternative for early years education sets a course far from the modernist trap in which it has been lodged. Their orientations explain, to some extent, the relative lack of philosophical discussion that exists about the very young beyond mysterious encounters such as those described by Heraclitus and his laughing boy who inevitably outwits all his (adult) players (Frankel, 1938). Rather than a return to romanticism, their provocations invite new ways of conceptualizing pedagogy. James Stillwaggon, expanding on this dilemma, invokes Orwell to highlight the divided nature of pedagogy in romantic and modern visions of the ideal childhood. Here, a central pedagogical conflict between rationalism and sentimentality is unleashed. Stillwaggon invites his readers to consider the nostalgic bind this divide poses for early childhood and the future place

of formal education in young children's lives where one is promoted over another with little regard for its historical and ideological locale. Given the care–education pedagogical divide that is so often summoned in early years research and practice, this is a key issue for early childhood education. In response, Stillwaggon radically questions the contemporary legitimacy of childhood as a useful construct, invoking Kristeva's framing of the *spector* at the outskirts of discourse. It is here where pedagogy is frequently summoned as a means of bringing the child into the [adult] fold of logos.

For Daniela and Duncan Mercieca there is no such divide. They situate their article within a pedagogy of intervention, lamenting what they carefully establish as a prevalent emphasis on pedagogical duty where learning 'problems' are identified. In this view, pedagogies comprised of certainty, based on 'experts' who know what is needed, claim legitimacy. Basing their critique on the writings of Ranciere, the authors question deficit attitudes that herald the need for intervention; and, with the help of Derrida, challenge the emphasis on duty as various forms of giving. Ranciere's stance enables Mercieca and Mercieca to consider early intervention as an issue of inequality——one where the child is placed within deficit paradigms, exacerbated by the knowledgeable interrogation of the expert who seeks solutions to the 'problem' that they themselves have identified. In this position, the teacher must drive the learner's will; in the case of early intervention this means both child and parent who must be shown the error of their ways in order to escape their deficiencies. Such policing, argue these authors, lies at the heart of early intervention pedagogy and aligns wholeheartedly with order, rationality and certainty: it is the very essence of the pedagogical regimes that govern. Mercieca and Mercieca offer an alternative in the form of *aporia*, a route through which intervention might be viewed as a form of hesitation, a recognition of the impossible as well as the possible. They suggest, therefore, an elimination (or at least a reduction) of the divide between those needing intervention and those intervening——a point examined by several contributors to this edition to one extent or another. Such a stance calls for changed attitudes, attention to alternative voices and the capacity to explore alternative potentialities.

Implications for pedagogy based on Havellian provocations by Marek Tesar also issue salutary messages regarding the dangers of intervention, albeit through a different route. Investigating the production of children's political subjectivities, Tesar provides a thoughtful commentary on the Czechoslovakian treatment of the 'American beetle', comparing this to the strategic production of Ministry-produced books for early childhood contexts in New Zealand as a form of governmentality. Borrowing from Foucault, Tesar invites readers to contemplate the manipulative potential, and perhaps inevitability, of pedagogy as a means of turning childhoods into a mouldable commodity. Such a message is sobering indeed!

Lurking beneath the common pedagogical penchant for intervention lies an orientation towards *paedia*: the poetry of childhood that belies scientific certainty and turns towards a more creative and complex appreciation of the youngest learners in relation with other. It is here where the young child fully claims his or her agentic stance within the bounds of formal early childhood education. This point is made across several of the articles in various ways throughout this issue. In her inspired critique of early childhood pedagogy as 'knowing', Sheena Elwick argues that when knowing

becomes too certain, it can present a pedagogical limitation. In her article she argues that early experience is dynamic, embodied and relational in moments that unfold between adult and child. Merleau-Ponty is, for the first (but not the last) time in this issue, invoked as a means of examining such lived encounters pedagogically. Processes such as non-symmetrical reversibility and ecart promote the complex relational aspects of seeing and being seen (a concept also explored in this issue by Johansson and Løkken from the other side of the world). With the addition of Dillon's ethical reflection, Sheena issues a serious pedagogical challenge that asks 'to what extent do I diminish other through my gaze?' and, in doing so, provides a strongly reflexive challenge to teacher and researcher alike.

Eva Johansson and Gunvor Løkken also explore a possible route to embodied and ethical pedagogical encounters in early childhood education by proposing the concept of 'sensory pedagogy', again drawing from Merleau-Pontian phenomenology. Like Elwick and White they decentre learning as an individual experience towards relationships that pay attention to a greatly broadened approach to the experience of the child *and* the impact of that experience on the adult. Exploiting Gadamer's notion of the horizon, Johansson and Lokken present their case for pedagogy as an engagement with other-ness through five levels of perception: sight, sound, felt, 'being there' and a materialization of consciousness as a body-subject. They present the 'heavy-door' metaphor as a means of explaining the physical event of pedagogical encounter that calls teachers into sensory, material experience with the lived world of the child in ways that uphold difference and alterity as a moral imperative. Instead of merely engaging with the child's ideas, in this pedagogical realm emphasis is given to the teacher's own sensory experience and its powerful presence.

A pedagogical orientation proffered by Jayne White also calls for teachers to trust in the agency of the young child and their alteric potential and, as a consequence, to attend to the ethical implications of seeing in pedagogical encounters. Her tongue-in-cheek Bakhtinian orientation towards a carnivalesque stance promotes a view of the teacher akin to the Carl Pilkington counter-claims of Ricky Gervais (2010), acting as a source of ridicule or irony through hyperbole, satire and paradox. Heralding a celebratory stance to the deviance of young children as a source of humour, White explores the dialogical potential of pedagogy as a horizontal and vertical engagement and, at times, non-engagement in the social experience of the young child. Acceptance of such unbridled creativity draws early years education far from a singular focus on *valued knowledge* and its pedagogical outcry towards an appreciation of 'unmerged potential'. Here, attention is paid to ontological approaches to education that emphasize the possibility of alternative or, from a carnivalesque standpoint, suspended realities and subjective experience as both intersubjectivity and alterity on the part of the learner in concert with others (as a form of dialogue).

Likewise, ontological concepts are examined in a turn to curriculum and pedagogy in two articles, one by Chris Peers and Marilyn Fleer, and the other by Eila Estola, Sandy Farquhar and Anna-Maija Puroila. Peers and Fleer examine concepts of *belonging, being* and *becoming* within the Australian curriculum, while Estola, Farquhar and Puroila explore pedagogical interpretations of *well-being* in Finnish and New Zealand curriculum and practice. Both articles return to ancient Greek philosophical traditions

to address different and paradoxical ways of understanding existence raised by these concepts. Estola et al. enjoin eudaimonic and hedonic conceptions of well-being to explore two separate dialogical episodes between young children, teachers and researchers. Through their narrative exploration of children's lived experience, the authors argue for a conscious inclusion of ideas that may differ from everyday conceptions of well-being. Focusing on the verbal, non-verbal and embodied actions of the teachers and children in their studies, they state that children's and teachers' well-being is expressed in unique interrelational ways. They signal a need for those involved in early childhood policy and practice to broaden their understanding of children's responses and experiences, rather than harnessing understanding to linear expressions and logical narratives.

Peers and Fleer also emphasize the need for further understanding of conceptual delineations in their timely discussion of the insertion of *belonging* in the Australian Early Years Learning Framework. They suggest that the insertion of *belonging* alongside *being* and *becoming* in the Framework is an opportunity for broader debate around common conceptions of belonging as 'nurturance and familiarity'. Drawing on Kant, Heidegger and Vygotsky, they indeed start this debate, situating belonging as an expression of 'motion' where the self and the unknowable Other necessarily coexist in such a way that does not negate one or the Other. This timely addition to the issue directs pedagogical attention to the cultural significance of the learner, challenging strongholds of certainty across time and space (see also Tsolidis, 2010). Given the Framework's emphasis on diversity, this article is an important conversation to be continued in order to mitigate the risk of collapsing belonging into a generic sameness.

Contemporary Challenges for Pedagogy in the Early Years

In the considerations each author provides we are left with the question: how, then, are we to think about and enact pedagogy in the early years? What might be said about pedagogy, as we have tried to elucidate, is deeply implicated in interpretations of learning. Here, we suggest, philosophy plays a central role. Rather than resting on certainty——as a universal truth of knowing——this issue unsettles the discourse in radical ways. In the *EPAT* (2007) special issue *Philosophy of early childhood*, Peters (p. 224) commented that the authors were involved with new approaches in philosophy and ethics that 'extend the critical task of reformulating early childhood education and the philosophy of the child'. This second early childhood special issue presents a further opportunity to map out different pathways that foreground pedagogy as an ontological experience across time and space as much, if not more than, an epistomological encounter. The contributors to this issue have charted the territory by considering pedagogy in the realms of intersubjectivity and alterity, as an ethical, creative experience or approach, an encounter with other-ness and the mystery of what is yet to be known. Such views invoke pedagogical responses that urge teachers to consider their own position as players in a dialogical process of learning that implicates them as much as the learner. Each of these unique articles, in its own way, accentuates the

situatedness of pedagogy and the becoming of the subject, seeking a positioning of pedagogy as necessarily provisional, compositional and discursive.

Neither the contributors to this issue, nor we as editors, seek to provide a definitive answer to a specific pedagogical quest, but instead invite the reader into a philosophical odyssey to explore the limits of certainty and to invite reflection on the meaning of childhood and learning in relation to pedagogy in the early years. For us, closure is not a desirable state of affairs as we see pedagogy as a form of engagement that invites its players into the kinds of debates this issue has provoked. The quest then is to appreciate, as opposed to know or (worse) to manipulate, the very young as members of a complex, contested and contestable domain we have come to know as 'early childhood education'. From what the authors in this issue tell us, there is much to be explored in this regard.

Notes

1. It would be difficult to find any Western ECE teacher training programme that did not privilege these three thinkers in their courses.
2. Indeed, at the time of writing this article a New Zealand Learning Outcomes Working Group (Ministry of Education, 2012) was preparing a framework aligned to these ideals.
3. While Zoe is the name of a child in White's study, it is also a term used to represent a powerful life force (Bennett, 2010).

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