

Both/And: Reflections on Recent Anglo/Western Early Childhood Curriculum Statements

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This paper identifies innovative work on curriculum undertaken in New Zealand in the 1990s as inspirational for recently developed frameworks in Australia and parts of Canada. The paper argues that the form this incorporation has taken in Canada and Australia is, almost literally, an opening of 'some space'—as the more established modernist and technical understandings have not been entirely transformed or removed, but rather joined by perspectives that emphasize the need for a more complex, reflective and contextually situated practitioner—creating a contemporary policy landscape of 'both/and'. The paper describes and analyzes in detail the processes and dynamics of the 'both/and' landscape achieved in British Columbia, Canada.

Key words : early childhood education curriculum frameworks, ECE policy-practice relationships, New Zealand, Canada, Australia

Historically, Anglo/Western countries' engagement with early childhood care and education (ECCE) has been remarked on for their shared differences with many other parts of the Western world (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Moss, 2007). Observers have often highlighted the reticence these countries have had in supporting ECCE as a public service. Although not exclusive to them, Anglo/Western countries have also resisted seeing the provision of ECCE services as a professional activity, typically limiting the amount of education and training

deemed necessary to be an early childhood educator (Moss & Petrie, 2002). Only New Zealand amongst a set of five Anglo/Western countries (England, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) has deviated significantly from the path broadly described above. That deviation is reflected in New Zealand being the only one of these five countries to be included in the 'top 10' of 25 OECD countries evaluated in a UNICEF 'Child Care Transition' Report released in December 2008 (UNICEF, 2008). Canada, Australia and the United States, along with Ireland, occupy the bottom four positions on the 25 country ranking.

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There are signs, however, that Australia and at least two provinces in Canada are moving to emulate New Zealand and other programs deemed 'progressive' (see Soler & Miller, 2010). Australia's recently released

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Government of Australia, 2009), and slightly earlier curriculum frameworks developed in British Columbia (Government of British Columbia, 2008) and New Brunswick (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, 2007) are incorporating language and concepts familiar in New Zealand, as well as in Reggio Emilia and in Sweden. The form this incorporation has taken in Canada and Australia is, almost literally, an opening of 'some space'—as the more established modernist and technical understandings have not been entirely transformed or removed, but rather joined by perspectives that emphasize the need for a more complex, reflective and contextually situated practitioner—creating a contemporary policy landscape of 'both/and'.

Soler and Miller (2010) characterize these differences as points on a continuum from "vocational and instrumental views" on one end to "progressive views" on the other (p.58), while Bennett (2005) notes the differences between "traditional pre-primary school" and a "social pedagogy tradition" (p.5). In related observations, Edwards (2003) contrasts a "Piagetian interpretation regarding development" with a "socio-cultural explanation" (p.251), and Moss (2007) contrasts "modernity" with "post-foundationalism" and references a 'paradigmatic divide' between them (p.1). The various terms used and frames applied are of interest as we do not see an omnibus, unified and international movement driving change in specific countries so much as concerns and dissatisfactions with the limitations inherent in approaches to regulation that have failed to provide services that are deemed 'optimal' by any criteria, and which have been criticized in particular for their failure to address issues of diversity and context (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2005).

This paper identifies work undertaken in New Zealand in the mid- to late-1980s and throughout the 1990s as inspirational for later work in Australia and

parts of Canada. While New Zealand has not been the only source of inspiration (northern Italy and Scandinavian countries are also often noted), the shared colonial history of these three Anglo/Western countries, similarities in their governance structures, and heightened sensitivity to increasing diversity in their populations, particularly in regards to Indigenous Peoples, represent points of commonality—and of possibility.

The paper will first briefly consider the processes and experiences of change that re-formed ECCE in New Zealand, employing a lens focusing on issues of culture. Secondly, it will examine the 'both/and' dynamic that currently exists in curriculum and policy related materials in Australia through its recently promulgated national curriculum framework, *Belonging, Being and Becoming* (2009); and in the Canadian province of British Columbia (due to space limitations, we focus on BC only, even though we acknowledge a 'both/and' approach taken in New Brunswick, and to some degree in Saskatchewan). Introducing new concepts and wording into key government documents is one facet of change, but as we currently see in most 'both/and' jurisdictions, long established procedures, training approaches, and assessment tools may be at variance with such new perspectives. Many of these have been addressed over time in New Zealand and they must now be addressed in other jurisdictions as they too seek to reform the field as a truly professional and contextually effective service. Facets of this change process will be explored in the third section of this paper, basing that discussion primarily on recent activities in British Columbia. The paper concludes with a call for greater engagement across countries to more fully share and appreciate both the complexities and the promises of introducing a change agenda in regards to ECCE. With its ground-breaking curriculum, New Zealand has much to offer both to Canada and Australia in regards to these changes. Certain facets of that history will be briefly discussed in the following section.

Aspects of the Aotearoa/ New Zealand Experience

Aotearoa/New Zealand has been a leader amongst Anglo/Western countries in embracing an agenda of change. Typically, attention is drawn to the development of the Te Whariki Early Childhood Curriculum document (Carr & May, 1992; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1993, 1996) as key in signaling change in the country; however, we feel it is important to start the story earlier with a focus on social changes that helped transform key New Zealand opinion leaders' understandings of their country from that of a relatively narrow Anglo/Western identity, to a multi-cultural, multi-lingual identity. Such transformations opened up to various changes, such as those seen in ECCE, and resonate with social changes seen in Canada in the last decades of the 20th Century and which have come to the fore in Australia with, for example, broad public support for 'the Apology' to the Indigenous peoples of the country (Government of Australia, 2008).

New Zealand's change was born, in part, out of a Maori consciousness raising movement with roots in the post-World War II period (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Such resistance and revitalization movements were evident in many countries, with the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. having a particularly high profile internationally. Such important stories are well beyond the scope of this paper, but the rights movements in the U.S. and in New Zealand are of interest here in regards to what emerged from each in the field of ECCE. In the United States, the Civil Rights movement produced Head Start; in New Zealand, it led to the Te Kohanga Reo programs. One of the stated purposes of Head Start was to 'break the inter-generational cycle of poverty' and to more effectively integrate poor, often Black or other 'minority' children, into mainstream society. On the other hand, the purpose of the Te Kohanga Reo was to reinforce intergenerational bonds and unique identities, the absence of which leads to a poverty of

self, arguably far more profound and problematic than a poverty of income. The approach taken in the United States was an effort to 'enhance assimilation', a position long reflected in the U.S.'s 'melting pot' approach to diversity; while in Aotearoa/New Zealand one finds an effort to 'enhance recognition', a rights-based approach underscored by the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi (Waitangi Tribunal, 2010). While Te Kohanga Reo programs were truly 'grass-roots' movements, led by respected local leaders of the community for the community; Head Start, although well-meaning and led by some of the nation's 'best and the brightest', was largely planned by those outside the community, rather than being generated by the community. The community was invited in after certain key decisions had already been made. Therein lies a paradigm difference that continues to challenge well-meaning 'outsiders': who defines what is 'good', what is 'desirable', what is 'quality', and why the envisioned program is important?

The Aotearoa/New Zealand Te Kohanga Reo story is a different story than is found in most other Anglo/Western countries, which are traditionally driven from the top down, seeing regulation and standardization as means to address quality and accountability. However, those same regulations and standards can be easily understood as means for control and conformity when viewed from the bottom up. As other countries, like Canada and Australia, become ever more sensitized to their multi-cultural realities and the presence of Indigenous Peoples who have been horribly ill-served by Western, top-down 'best practices', the opportunity for other ways of understanding grows, and we believe that these transformed understandings represent one facet facilitating change in Canada and Australia in regards to ECCE services, as was the case in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The Kaupapa Maori movement with its emphasis on community leadership and responsibility, along with the rapid growth of locally led Te Kohanga Reo programs (100 were established in 1982, and over 800

by 1994, Te Kohanga Reo National Trust, 2010), can be understood as correlated with other factors helping to shape reforms that took place in the Aotearoa/New Zealand early childhood field in the late 1980s. These changes included the establishment of educational equivalence for early childhood educators with primary school teachers (three-year Diploma of Teaching, 1988—one person per program initially, but extended over time); a merger of two major early childhood unions in 1990; and, associated with the 'Before Five' early childhood policy (Lange, 1988, a common funding formula for all forms of early childhood services, and definitions of quality programming and regulation that extended across the diverse services sector. Consistent with an earlier report, *Education to be More* (Department of Education Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988), the Before Five policy included a de-centralized approach to regulation that required individual programs, in consultation with the parents, the staff and the community, to develop their own 'Charter' that outlined their philosophy, goals and how they delivered a 'quality' program (Carr & May, 1993). Such an approach is consistent with the locally initiated Te Kohanga Reo programs that started in 1982.

By 1990, following a change in government from Labour to the conservative National government, there was pressure on the early childhood community to produce an early childhood 'national curriculum', an aspect yet to be fully addressed in the government's discussion document *The National Curriculum of New Zealand* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1991; Carr & May, 2000). The Ministry of Education funded a proposal submitted by Margaret Carr and Helen May in 1991 and a draft of a national early childhood curriculum was submitted to the Ministry by the end of 1992. That first draft of Te Whariki not only incorporated Maori terms but Maori concepts, and was to open new possibilities for government's role in promoting early childhood services—possibilities that broke with long dominant

technical, instrumental and centralized views associated with modernity's impact on the role of the state and its policies (Scott, 1998). Carr and May (2000) note that their approach had strong support in the emergent literature—and in local communities:

By the 1990s the national and international education and early childhood education literature was more loudly acknowledging diverse rather than universal viewpoints and taking an increasingly sociocultural and post-structural view of learning, childhood and curriculum....the ideas in Te Whariki came primarily from local and cultural voices... (p. 8)

Carr and May's comments underscore the importance of transformed national contexts, for academia as well as for other spheres of national activity. Their sensitivity to early childhood 'sociocultural and poststructural' literature that had begun to emerge in the late 1980s and early 1990s was, at the same time, being put forward in the United States by ECCE academics concerned at the strongly universalistic, narrowly developmentalist, and prescriptive position of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a powerful and relatively conservative professional association. Those challenging the NAEYC's *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* document came to be called the 'reconceptualists', however, unlike the situation in Aotearoa/New Zealand where poststructural perspectives transformed ECCE, similar voices in the U.S. were soon marginalized and remain so to the present.

Aotearoa/New Zealand's approach to early childhood curriculum has, over the years and increasingly so in the 21st century, found sympathetic responses in Canada and Australia. As noted earlier, we believe that this is due in part to transformations in the ways in which these two countries see themselves—routes pioneered by New Zealand in large part due to strong Maori voices or marginalized 'others' who were no longer prepared to be ignored.

As noted, the Te Whariki curriculum incorporates not only Maori terms, but concepts. The word itself, Whariki, refers to a woven mat that 'all can stand on'. The mat features intersecting principles and strands. The four principles include: Whakamana- Empowerment; Kotahitanga- Holistic Development; Whanau Tangata- Family and Community; and Nga Hononga- Relationships. The five strands are: Mana Atua- Well-being; Mana Whenua- Belonging; Mana Tangata: Contribution; Mana Reo- Communication; and Mana Aoturoa- Exploration. The document notes: "The principles, strands, and goals are common to all early childhood services. The ways in which they are put into practice, however, may differ from service to service" (1996, p. 10).

Creative curriculum statements, like the Te Whariki, while essential for creative reform, are only one facet of change in a much larger process (see for example, *Pathways to the Future – Nga Huarahi Arataki 2002-2012*, New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2002). New Zealand has continued to play a leadership role in these other facets as well: educational preparation and assessment approaches are two that are critically important to sustain a transformative agenda. New Zealand's creation of educational equity in the form of a three-year diploma requirement for early childhood educators as well as primary teachers, was flagged earlier (extended to cover an increasing percentage of early childhood educators over time). Training and preparatory education is a key facet of implementing a more sophisticated and contextualized approach to services (Carr & May, 2000). Assessment is another key issue impacting such an implementation. Carr and May (2000) flag that "assessment is the tail that wags the curriculum dog" (p. 14). Carr in particular has been a leader in this regard, developing an approach to assessment, learning stories (Carr, 2001), that is consistent with the philosophy of Te Whariki. Similar to the practice of pedagogical documentation found in Reggio Emilia and in Sweden, this approach is currently being piloted in British Columbia as part of a larger in-

service educational process led by the second author (see section 3 below). Before describing that work, we will briefly comment on the 'both/and' character of recent curriculum documents in Australia and Canada that provide a basis for innovative education and assessment.

'Both/And' Approach to Curriculum Frameworks

Achieving a place for progressive statements is challenging work. Sumsion et al. (2009) provide a useful 'behind the scenes' review of the tensions and processes that led to the Australian curriculum framework. The authors note:

We endeavoured to deliberately weave in words that can cross borders and divides, resonate with diverse audiences, and be taken up differently within different discourses and narratives... The partial success of these strategies explains, in part, the hybrid-like nature of the EYLF. To our 'insider' eyes, it contains signs of the many negotiated settlements that characterised its development. Hybrids can lack the seemingly effortless coherence of a unified narrative. On the other hand, through their dissonance, and by implicitly acknowledging that true consensus is not readily achievable, they leave open spaces for ongoing conversations, destabilisation, and new articulations and narratives. (p. 7-8)

Unlike New Zealand's (Carr & May, 1993, 2000; Nuttall, 2003) and Australia's (Sumsion et al., 2009) attention to the dynamics of creating and implementing curriculum documents, descriptions of the processes employed in Canada have not been published (unfortunately, we would say, as these processes are key to better engaging in such deliberations in the future). The second author, Pacini-Ketchabaw, has been involved in some aspects of discussions that took place during the creation of the British Columbia Early Learning Framework

(Government of British Columbia, 2008) and, in what follows, she briefly reflects on some of the processes.

The development of the BC Early Learning Framework was led by the Ministry of Education in partnership with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The Ministries invited a group of approximately 20 individuals to advise them on the directions that the province was considering for a curriculum framework. The group was comprised of early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, researchers, college instructors, early intervention professionals, and other early years service providers in BC. Initially, diverse perspectives were introduced to the group (e.g., US-informed perspectives that emphasized standards for practice, as well as more philosophical- and principle-based approaches such as those followed by Sweden and New Zealand). These approaches resonated very differently among the group. While some members felt comfortable with an approach that moves away from prescription; many others (mirroring the historical trajectory of ECE in Canada, see Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010) believed that a prescriptive approach was needed to ensure the field would respond in a favorable fashion. Group members grappled with the idea of emphasizing the concept of the image of the child as social construction as opposed to the concept of developmentally appropriate practice. Following several discussions, the Ministries adopted a principle-based approach, drawing primarily from the Te Whariki, as well as from Swedish perspectives (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007) and the practices implemented in Reggio Emilia, Italy (Rinaldi, 2006). At approximately the same time that the BC Early Learning Framework was being developed, another Canadian province, New Brunswick, was similarly attracted to work in Scandinavia, northern Italy, and New Zealand. Those influences appear in their Early Learning and Child Care English Curriculum Framework for New Brunswick (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, 2007).

A draft of the BC Early Learning Framework was made available on the Ministry's website in July 2007 and a final document was published in May 2008. The final version of the document reflects a certain amount of the both/and, or hybrid approach, found in Australia's document, however it also sets itself apart from all earlier Canadian documents as can be seen in the following excerpt.

British Columbia Early Learning Framework

Vision

Early learning is envisioned as a dynamic process, actively supported by families and other adults who care for and teach children in their homes and communities.

Purpose

If you are an early childhood educator, early years professional, or other type of service provider, this document will give you tools to reflect on the early learning experiences you create with and for children, to guide programs and activities you provide for children, and to support dialogue with and between families about their children's early learning.

Image of the Child

This framework views young children as capable and full of potential; as persons with complex identities, grounded in their individual strengths and capacities, and their unique social, linguistic, and cultural heritage. In this image, children are rooted in and take nourishment from a rich, supportive ground, comprised of relationships with their families and communities, their language and culture, and the surrounding environment.

Four Areas of Early Learning

The Framework outlines four areas of early learning that are based on these principles: Well-being and Belonging; Exploration and Creativity;

Languages and Literacies; and Social Responsibility and Diversity.

Adapted from the British Columbia Early Learning Framework (Government of British Columbia, 2008)

Even though initially there was fear that educators or college instructors would not be receptive to these new ideas, once the Framework was made public they responded positively. Interestingly, the areas that educators and college instructors found most exciting were those that resonate with postmodern characteristics.

The whole Framework seems to be geared toward having us reflect, so that every ECE is driven to reflect: What are our values? What is our image of the teacher, of the child, and overall, of education? Those are the cornerstones for quality programs, so if we can reflect on those issues, we can move forward to having quality programs. (educator)

It has the potential to elevate ... or make visible children and their educators and their caregivers. (college instructor)

Beyond 'Both/And' in the British Columbia Experience

The government of B.C. was sensitive to the fact that the document they published was qualitatively different than what the field and broader community had previously experienced. They, and the Unit for Early Learning and Child Care Research and Professional Development (UCCR) at the University of Victoria, appreciated that if the new document was to 'gain traction' in the field it would be necessary to prepare the field and to do so in concert with public colleges (the primary ECE training institutions in the province). A proposal to work with several colleges representing different geographical regions, and with early childhood educators from those same regions to engage with the new document was funded by the Ministry of Education in 2008.

The project was conceived as a three-strand, train-the-trainer approach. Strand 1 was a professional development phase focused on developing leaders from the field (field leaders) who would deliver training regarding the BC Early Learning Framework and its implementation at the local level. In other words, field leaders were the recipients of the training in Strand 1, and they then became co-deliverers, along with college instructors, of training in Strands 2 and 3. In Strand 1, field leaders participated in three components: an introductory face-to-face workshop, 13 weeks of online training (seven modules), and a final one-day face-to-face workshop. Strand 2 brought the 17 field leaders together with 22 ECE college instructors from 10 different colleges representing a wide range of regions in a workshop format to begin the planning process for delivery of the Strand 3 regional workshops (September 2008). Strand 3 regional workshops for early childhood educators were held across the province, again co-led by college instructors and field leaders, and were held January 2009 through March 2009.

The project team chose training materials to reflect the philosophy underlying the BC Early Learning Framework. As noted above, the BC Early Learning Framework invites critical reflection as a means to transform early childhood education and also acknowledges the importance of careful observation as a means to support children's learning. The curriculum that was developed focused on the processes and skills involved in critical reflection and offered a tool called pedagogical narration¹ to give educators skills and techniques to deepen their understanding of children's ordinary moments and to provide enriched learning opportunities. An implementation guide titled *Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice* (Government of British Columbia, 2009), developed by the research team, describes the pedagogical narration process and gives detailed practical examples of how the tool was used during the training by field leaders. This publication is a key

element of the facilitators' guide that is used in the province-wide practitioners' training activities.

The curriculum to introduce these tools was envisaged as a process of deconstructing and then reconstructing the image of the child. This process required a specific set of skills which, once understood and practiced, could be operationalized in a manner that would support the implementation of the four areas of early learning laid out in the BC Early Learning Framework. While different delivery options were used for different strands, the project team focused on providing training that was delivered by trusted and known colleagues, was dynamic and interactive, included a variety of support materials, and accentuated the importance of critical reflection both in groups and individually. A key outcome of the field leader training was the production of exemplar materials of the process by which pedagogical narrations are created. These materials were then used in Strands 2 and 3 to demonstrate the pedagogical narration process and build skills in the practitioners trained in Strand 3.

Overall, support for the BC Early Learning Framework has been strong and project participants have valued their involvement in the implementation project, particularly the tool of pedagogical narration and the implementation guide that provides practical, hands-on suggestions for embedding the Framework in early years practice (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2009). When the project completed its one-year timeline, it was clear that more was needed to be done to appropriately ramp-up for the implementation of the Framework. Those next stages include:

First, practitioners need to engage in further ongoing professional development training to increase their comfort level with the BC Early Learning Framework's approach and the tool of pedagogical narration so that they can smoothly integrate them into their practice.

Second, for field leaders it was a very challenging year-long process to garner the knowledge and leadership skills to create their own exemplars and to

then undertake the successful training of others. It is important to build on their commitment and acknowledge the effort and extra time it takes to act in a professional development capacity and be available to support implementation in their locality or region.

Third, options need to be explored to create and maintain the development of exemplars that reflect the cultural diversity of young children and ECE practitioners, as well as the diversity of care arrangements in the province.

Fourth, the Ministry and its partners need to explore ways to support continued networking that the project implementation has engendered. Both facilitators and workshop participants saw the need to continue networking and sharing as part of the implementation process. As mentioned by several participants, the need to create avenues for sharing is particularly important for those who work alone.

Fifth, the Ministry and its partners need to consider ongoing training by adopting a process similar to that of the project in its professional development of field leaders.

Finally, college instructors need to incorporate the BC Early Learning Framework and the tool of pedagogical narration into their curriculum to ensure that new entrants to ECE are familiar with these provincial initiatives. This recommendation speaks to a way of increasing the number of practitioners who are fully knowledgeable and comfortable with the concepts and practices at the outset of their practical work experience.

Concluding Thoughts

As individuals committed to progressive change in ECCE curriculum and services we are very pleased that the types of initiatives, policies and perspectives achieved in New Zealand, in Sweden and in Reggio Emilia are being taken up by provinces in Canada and by the federal and state governments in Australia. The creation of progressive curriculum frameworks is,

however, only the first step in the re-formation of early childhood services. Education and training, assessment and regulation must also be re-formed for new policy statements to be realized 'on the ground'. Such multi-component work has a lengthy history in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and has commenced in Australia with approval of the Belonging, Being and Becoming Curriculum Framework. We are pleased that the Government of B.C. has also launched appropriate pilot activities following the publication of the BC Early Learning Framework.

Given the historic nature of these initiatives in the Anglo/Western world, and the unparalleled opportunity for these countries to learn from each other, we recommend that as a first step a Tri-Country conference (that also includes countries such as Italy and Sweden where progressive policies have a long history) be held with an intent to define and design a next generation approach to early childhood services that can better address the needs of diverse populations achievable through appropriately trained and compensated, reflective practitioners.

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Notes

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- ⁱ A tool adapted from pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia, Italy and in Sweden (Dahlberg et al., 2007); learning stories in New Zealand (Carr, 2001); and action research in Australia (Mac Naughton, 2003).