

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

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*Starting Strong II*

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

# Aldo Fortunati

## *The Education of Young Children as a Community Project*

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

# Themes

Consider

- **Material conditions and structures** of the early childhood workforce
- **Understandings** of the worker and her work- what is our image of the EC worker?

In the context of ECEC systems and how we understand EC institutions- what is our image of the nursery or kindergarten?

Gender important – but not a theme today

# ECEC systems

## The historical legacy

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

# The move to more integrated ECEC systems

*Education Ministries* responsible for *all* 0-6  
ECEC services : Brazil, England, Iceland, New  
Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden

BUT VARY IN HOW FAR INTEGRATION  
HAS GONE

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

# ECEC provision

Split between ‘childcare services’ and ‘nursery schools/kindergartens’

Understandings of ‘childcare services’:

- Substitute home
- Selling commodity (childcare) to consumers (working parents)
- Technology producing predetermined and normative outcomes

# ECEC workforce

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

‘Childcare workers’: low level education and poor pay and conditions

Understandings of the childcare worker:

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

# Why are childcare workers in this position?

## 1. Work devalued:

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

## 2. ‘Childcare’ services as private commodity:

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

# Why?

## 3. Paradigm: the invisible issue

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

# Paradigm

## Values

- certainty and mastery, linearity and *predetermined* outcomes, objectivity and universality

## Belief in

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

Need - technicians trained in right answers

# Future directions for ECEC workforce

*Steady as she goes*

Incremental change, ignoring basic problems

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

But there are other possibilities...

# Future directions

## *The case for changing course*

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

# New (or renewed) understandings

Early childhood institution as a place of:

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

# Early childhood worker

Early childhood worker understood as a:

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

# Early childhood worker as democratic professional

## *Values/qualities*

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

# Dialogic

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

Carlina Rinaldi: *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*

# Democratic

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

# Critical thinking

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

Nikolas Rose: *Powers of Freedom*

# Researching

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

Carlina Rinaldi: *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*

# Listening, openness to otherness

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

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

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

# Uncertainty

“[Uncertainty is a] quality that you can offer, not only a limitation. ..*You have to really change your being, to recognise doubt and uncertainty, to recognise your limits as a resource, as a place of encounter, as a quality.* Which means that you accept that you are unfinished, in a state of permanent change, and your identity is in the dialogue.”

Carlina Rinaldi: *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*

# Subjectivity

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

Carlina Rinaldi: *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*

# Border crossing, curious

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

Carlina Rinaldi: *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia*

# Multiple perspectives

Recognise importance of paradigm – different paradigms ► different perspectives

Increasing ECEC research and practice within ‘postmodern’ paradigm

But paradigm invisible in policy and (most) education

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

# ‘Postmodern’ paradigm

“[The postmodern paradigm] values what the paradigm of modernity finds problematic: complexity and multiplicity, subjectivity and context, provisionality and uncertainty... This paradigm recognises that any phenomenon – early childhood education and care, for example - has multiple meanings, any knowledge is perspectival, all experience is subject to interpretation.”

Gunilla Dahlberg & Peter Moss: *Beyond quality to ethics and politics*

# Material conditions and structures for a democratic, inclusive and integrated EC service

Split systems are historical anachronisms – today  
we need an integrated 0-6 EC system

- Integrated government responsibility
- Integrated, multi-purpose services
- Integrative concept (e.g. ‘education in its broadest sense’)
- Integrated structures (incl. provision, funding, workforce)

## Integrated workforce for integrated ECEC

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

Options for profession:

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

or

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

or ??????????????

# Conditions and structures Strong education, equal pay

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

# Pedagogical documentation

Practice and learning processes:

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

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

Alfredo Hoyuelos; *Children in Europe 6*

# Structures and conditions Adequate public funding

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

Public expenditure on ECEC services:

Denmark=2% of GDP; Sweden=1.7%

US=0.4%, Canada=0.3%

OECD: *Starting Strong 2*

# In conclusion

***Get beyond split thinking and split structures***

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

Beyond divisive provision to inclusive children’s centres

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

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