Democracy and Experimentation:
Two fundamental values for education

Authors:

Peter Moss
University of London
Institute of Education
Thomas Coram Research Unit
peter.moss@ioe.ac.uk

Mathias Urban
University of East London
Cass School of Education and Communities
m.urban@uel.ac.uk

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Peter Moss and Mathias Urban

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Contact:

Anette Stein
Program Director
Effective Investments in Education
Bertelsmann Stiftung
Phone   +49 5241 81-81274
Mobile   +49 1737050039
Fax   +49 5241 81-681274
Anette.stein@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Content

1 German Introduction and Summary

Welche Möglichkeiten, aber vielleicht auch Begrenzungen, birgt eine evidenz-basierte Praxis für Reformen und Steuerung von öffentlicher Bildung und Erziehung? Welchen Stellenwert Daten und Fakten als Orientierungen für die Transformation von Bildungssystemen einnehmen können, diskutiert die internationale Bildungsforschung bereits seit längerem. Mit Prof. Peter Moss (Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London) und Dr. Mathias Urban (Cass School of Education, University of East London) geben zwei international renommierte Experten mit der vorliegenden Expertise wichtige Impulse für diese in Deutschland noch ausstehende Debatte.

Evidenz – also Daten und Fakten – werden nach Meinung der beiden Autoren erst durch ihre Einbettung und Interpretation in der konkreten gesellschaftlichen oder institutionellen Praxis bedeutsam. Sie plädieren deshalb für eine praxis-basierte Evidenz. Diese müsste sich vor allem durch eine demokratische und experimentelle Praxis auszeichnen für die und in der Daten und Fakten sowie „Techniken und Management" - je nach konkretem Kontext -unterstützend wirksam werden können. Techniken und Management bleiben aber bei einer praxis-basierten Evidenz immer den ethischen und politischen Wertentscheidungen für Reformen und Steuerung öffentlicher Bildung und Erziehung nachgeordnet. Die Autoren entwickeln ihre Ideen für eine demokratische und experimentelle öffentliche Bildung und Erziehung vor dem Hintergrund aktueller internationaler Wissenschaftsdiskurse. Sie machen Vorschläge, wie praxis-basierte Evidenz für Politik und pädagogische Praxis genutzt werden kann und so zu wirksamen Bildungsreformen beitragen könnte.

Demokratie und Experimentierung:
zwei zentrale Werte für Bildung und Erziehung

Ein Beitrag zum Projekt
Wirksame Bildungsinvestitionen
der Bertelsmann Stiftung
Peter Moss und Mathias Urban, 2010

Zusammenfassung

Das vorliegende Dokument ist als ein Beitrag zur Diskussion über notwendige Zukunftsorientierungen in der öffentlichen Bildung und Erziehung gedacht – in Deutschland und über Deutschland hinaus in Europa. Unsere Überlegungen gründen auf früheren Arbeiten der Autoren; zu democratic experimentalism (Moss, 2009; Fielding & Moss, in Kürze erscheinend) und zur Professionalisierung in der Frühpädagogik (Urban, 2008; 2009; 2010; Dalli & Urban, 2010). Wir sehen die politische und fachliche Debatte über öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung zunehmend geprägt von technokratischen Lösungsansätzen und ökonomischen (weitgehend unhinterfragten) Zwängen. Wir argumentieren in diesem Beitrag für eine Alternative, die wir für erstens realisierbar und zweitens notwendiger denn je halten: für eine öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung, die in ihren grundlegenden Werten, Orientierungen und Praktiken demokratisch und zugleich experimentell ist. Wenn wir in diesem Papier für demokratische und experimentelle öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung argumentieren, tun wir das in der Annahme und Anerkennung anderer möglicher Wert- und Praxisorientierungen. Nicht ob Erziehung Wertorientierung braucht ist unsere Frage, sondern welche Werte? Und welche Praktiken folgen aus unseren Entscheidungen?

Unsere Ausgangspunkte für diesen Beitrag

- Die Debatte zur Wirksamkeit öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung erscheint uns mehr denn je eingebettet in ein positivistisches Welt- und Wissenschaftsverständnis (Paradigma), mit einer übermäßigen Betonung von objektiver Information (Daten) als Grundlage für evidenzbasierte Praxis.

  Wir halten dagegen, dass die notwendige Veränderung öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung nicht allein eine technische Herausforderung ist. Es geht vielmehr um ethische und politische Entscheidungen als Grundlage jedes transformativen Projekts.

- Unser Argument in diesem Beitrag ist, dass technische Aspekte erzieherischer Praxis grundsätzlich den ethischen und politischen Aspekten nachgeordnet sein müssen und dass Evidenz nur durch Kontextualisierung und Interpretation Bedeutung gewinnt.

- Wir nähern uns daher der vorherrschendenden Debatte in unserem Feld mit einer Haltung respektvoller und konstruktiver Kritik: Wir erkennen die unterschiedlichen Sichtweisen an und sind überzeugt, dass es produktiv und demokratisch sein kann, die bestehenden Differenzen dialogisch zu öffnen.

Unsere Argumente im Überblick

Wir beziehen uns in diesem Beitrag auf öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung im weitesten Sinn – von der Geburt bis mindestens zum Ende der Schulpflicht. Unsere Überlegungen beschränken sich jedoch nicht auf Erziehung und Bildung in den ersten Lebensjahren; sie gelten für die gesamte Spanne lebenslangen Lernens. Mit dieser inklusiven Herangehensweise leisten wir einen Beitrag zur Diskussion zum Verhältnis von frühkindlicher Bildung (Krippe, Kindertageseinrichtung) und Grundschule – ein Verhältnis, das in vielen Ländern ein hierarchisches ist, das aber, so unsere Überzeugung, als gleichberechtige Partnerschaft neu definiert werden muss.

Wir organisieren den Text in drei Hauptteilen, von denen jeder eine grundlegende Frage demokratischer und experimenteller öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung behandelt: Warum? Was? Wie?

Im ersten Hauptteil entwickeln wir warum Demokratie und Experimentierung ganz grundsätzlich als Schlüssel gesehen werden müssen – zu öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung im Allgemeinen und zu einem Bildungsprojekt im Besonderen. Im zweiten Hauptteil beschreiben wir genauer, was wir unter Demokratie und Experimentierung verstehen. Was folgt daraus, fragen wir, Demokratie und Experimentierung als grundlegende Wertorientierung öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung und für jedes pädagogische Projekt anzuerkennen? Der dritte Hauptteil untersucht wie, d.h. unter welchen Bedingungen, demokratische und experimentelle Erziehung und Bildung am besten gedeihen. Wir schließen unseren Beitrag mit Vorschlägen für konkrete nächste Schritte zur Weiterführung der mit diesem Beitrag initiierten Diskussion – und zur Realisierung demokratischer und experimenteller öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung: Wie könnte ein Projekt der Veränderung beginnen?

Warum? Argumente für Demokratie und Experimentierung

- Begriffe und ihre Bedeutungen sind weder selbstverständlich noch neutral. Sie sind immer und grundsätzlich offen für Interpretationen aus einer Vielfalt von Perspektiven. Ein- und derselbe Begriff kann mit ganz unterschiedlichen, ggf. konträren Werten belegt sein, abhängig von unserem Ausgangspunkt und Blickwinkel. 'Qualität' und 'Exzellenz' als Beispiel für zwei weitverbreitete Konzepte in der bildungspolitischen Debatte mögen den einen erstrebenswert und positiv erscheinen; aus einer anderen, kritischen Perspektive sind es hochproblematische und potentiell gefährliche Begriffe. Bedeutungen sind immer subjektiv, parteiisch und notwendigerweise vorläufig. Sie sind immer anfechtbar – wir erörtern das am Beispiel von zwei Schlüsselkonzepten der fachlichen, öffentlichen und politischen Debatte in Deutschland: ganzheitlich und Bildung/Erziehung.

- Unterschiedliche Interpretationen von Begriffen und Konzepten zwingen uns, auszuwählen und Entscheidungen zu treffen. Aber wie geschieht das? Wer ist in den Prozess des Entscheidens einbezogen, wer davon ausgeschlossen? Und überhaupt: von welchen Prozessen ist hier die Rede? Hier kommt unweigerlich die Frage nach Machtverhältnissen ins Spiel, nach Partizipation und Exklusion, Differenz und Diversität. Unter den vielfältigen Möglichkeiten solche Entscheidungen zu treffen, erscheinen uns drei als vorherrschend in modernen demokratischen Gesellschaften im 21. Jahrhundert:
  Marktorientierung, Managementorientierung und Demokratisches Experiment.
  Wir sehen in der gegenwärtigen Debatte eine starke Tendenz zur Orientierung an Management, technischer Rationalisierung und Steuerung von Bildung und Bildungspolitik mit dem Blick auf möglichst effektive 'Produktion' vorbestimmter Ergebnisse (und sind uns dabei durchaus des Risikos einer unzulässigen Vereinfachung bewusst…).
- Über die Kritik dieser Debatte hinaus wollen wir das Augenmerk auf die dritte der angeführte Möglichkeiten richten: Wir argumentieren im Detail für demokratische Experimente; wir stützen unser Argument auf die Grundannahme, dass öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung notwendigerweise (und unvermeidbar) ein politisches und ethisches Projekt ist: Ein Projekt mit einer Vielfalt möglicher Zwecke und Ziele, realisiert in öffentlichen Einrichtungen (Schulen, Kindertageseinrichtungen …), im öffentlichen Raum unserer Zivilgesellschaft.
- Die Arbeit der Bertelsmann Stiftung selbst liefert ein Argument für demokratische und experimentelle Erziehung und Bildung: Von 'globalen Herausforderungen' ist die Rede (genauer: menschheitsbedrohende Katastrophen), z.B.:
  - die zunehmende weltweite Verbreitung von Atomwaffen;
  - die weltweite Klimaveränderungen mit der Folge von Auseinandersetzungen und Kriegen um Ressourcen sowie Massenmigration ausgelöst durch Wasser- und Nahrungsmittelknappheit;
  - die Bedrohung der Artenvielfalt;
  - die Unmöglichkeit unbegrenzten Wachstums;
  - die Dysfunktionalität unserer Wirtschafts- und Finanzsysteme.

Diese 'Herausforderungen' machen deutlich: Wir können nicht einfach weitermachen wie bisher – und sie sollten in allen Gesellschaften öffentlich, kritische, demokratische Debatten auslösen. Mit Blick auf öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung wird die Frage nach dem Zweck, dem wozu, immer kritischer und drängender. Demokratische Werte und Praktiken, gemeinsames Handeln und die Bereitschaft anders zu denken und zu handeln und neue Wege zu gehen wird angesichts der globalen Bedrohungen zunehmend wichtiger: 'Mehr vom selben' ist keine Option mehr.

- Unsere kritische Situation ist zugleich eine Gelegenheit. Öffentliche Bildung und Erziehung muss (und kann!) Komplexität und Vielfalt anerkennen und wertschätzen, kritisches und kre-

atives Denken, Verantwortlichkeit, Solidarität und soziale Gerechtigkeit praktizieren und fördern. Sie hat die Chance, neue Handlungsmöglichkeiten zu erproben.

- Transparenz und Hoffnung, die Möglichkeit von Erneuerung und sozialen Erfindungen, sind weitere Argumente für eine demokratische und experimentelle öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung. Sie setzen (unter anderem) an John Deweys Gedanken an: einem grundlegenden Vertrauen in die menschliche Fähigkeit zu intelligentem Urteilen und Handeln unter angemessenen Bedingungen.

Was? Demokratie und Experimentierung als Werte öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung

- Im zweiten Hauptteil dieses Beitrags erörtern wir demokratische und experimentelle Ansätze in Schule und Kindertageseinrichtung. Wir untersuchen zuerst ein mögliches Verständnis von Demokratie – als ein Konzept, das mehr bedeuten muss als eine Methode zur Organisation kollektiver Entscheidungsprozesse. Es geht darum anzuerkennen, dass es für komplexe Probleme nie eine richtige Lösung gibt. Es gibt vielmehr immer unterschiedliche Sichtweisen, Interessen und in der Regel ungleiche Machtverhältnisse. Meinungsverschiedenheiten, Konflikte und Konfrontationen, so unser Argument, sind ein Lebenszeichen jeder Demokratie. Demokratie heißt unterschiedliche Sichtweisen zu begrüßen und sichtbar zu machen – auf allen Ebenen. Demokratie heißt auch, die Vorläufigkeit jeder Entscheidung anzuerkennen. Aus dieser Perspektive ist Demokratie nicht nur eine Regierungsform sondern eine Lebensweise die alle Aspekte des täglichen Lebens durchdringt – nicht zuletzt in Schule und Kindertageseinrichtung.

- Unterschiedliche Perspektiven und Deutungen in der Alltagsdemokratie anzuerkennen und wertzuschätzen würde dann Möglichkeiten eröffnen um anzufechten, was Michel Foucault mit den Begriffen 'Dominante Diskurse' und 'Herrschaft der Wahrheit' beschreibt. Sich für Veränderung zu öffnen, d.h. den Gegebenheiten kritisch gegenüberzustehen und alternative Handlungsmöglichkeiten zu denken, ist der Kern dieser Alltagsdemokratie.

- Experimentierung, als Wert und Praxis öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung, ist eng verbunden mit unserem Verständnis von Epistemologie und Lernen. In kritischen erziehungstheoretischen Diskussionsbeiträgen gibt es eine wachsende Anerkennung, dass 'Wissen' weder statisch noch passiv ist; schon gar keine 'Abbildung' einer objektiven, bedingungslos gegebenen Welt. Erziehungstheoretiker und –philosophen weisen uns darauf hin, dass es an der Zeit ist, die Epistemologie der Repräsentation zu ersetzen durch eine Epistemologie der Entstehung (Emergenz). Die erstere (die traditionelle Grundlage 'schulischen' Unterrichtens) resultiert in pädagogischen Praktiken, die Kinder dazu bringen zu wollen, die Welt zu verstehen, wie sie ist. Die letztere in einer Pädagogik, die um das Schaffen neuer Verständnisse bemüht ist. Was in aktiver Auseinandersetzung mit der Welt entsteht, ist notwendigerweise und radikal neu. In Anlehnung an theoretische Arbeiten von Gert Biesta und Deborah Osberg

(u.a.) argumentieren wir für eine Pädagogik der Erfindung, die Schulen und Kindertagesein-richtungen als Orte der Erneuerung, nicht der Replikation, versteht. Versuch und Irrtum (Experimentierung) ist ganz grundsätzlich der einzige Weg Neues zu lernen. Wir beziehen uns hier auf Erfahrungen aus Kindertageseinrichtungen und Schulen – insbesondere aus den kommunalen Kindereinrichtungen der Stadt Reggio Emilia in Nord-Italien. An ihren Bei-spielen untersuchen wir, wie Bildungseinrichtungen Forschergemeinschaften bilden und unterstützen können – eine Herausforderung für herkömmliche Lehr- und Lernpraxis, und letztendlich für das Verhältnis von Theorie und Praxis.

- Im letzen Schritt in diesem Abschnitt untersuchen wir die Verbindung von Demokratie und Experimentierung (denn beide wären ja durchaus unabhängig voneinander oder in Verbin-dung mit ganz anderen Werten denkbar). Unser Vorschlag die beiden Konzepte zu verbinden, wurde angeregt von politischen Reformern, die (wie z.B. Roberto M. Unger) für eine radikale Erneuerung öffentlicher Institutionen eintreten – als Orte kollektiver experimen-teller Praxis.

Wie? Bedingungen für eine demokratische und experimentelle öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung

- In diesem dritten Abschnitt sprechen wir über die Bedingungen für demokratische und expe-rimentelle öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung.
- Bildungseinrichtungen – verstanden als Foren für Interaktion und Erfindung – können nicht isoliert vom gesellschaftlichen Umfeld gedacht werden und bestehen.
- Demokratie und Experimentierung sind hoch ansprüchliche Konzepte; wenn sie gedeihen sollen, müssen wir günstige Bedingungen schaffen.
- Eine der wichtigsten Voraussetzungen dabei sind Fachkräfte – professionelle Erzieherinnen und Erzieher mit einer Leidenschaft (und Fähigkeit) für demokratische und experimentelle pädagogische Praxis.
- Erzieherinnen und Lehrerinnen sind – wie die Bildungseinrichtungen in denen sie arbeiten – Teil einer Zivilgesellschaft, die selbst eine Reihe von Voraussetzungen für Demokratie und Experimentierung bereitstellen muss. Wir nennen die wichtigsten:
  - Weniger Ungleichheit der Gesellschaft;
  - Ein Staat, der Demokratie und Experimentierung aktiv fördert;
  - Eine Infrastruktur für Demokratie und Experimentierung;
  - Bildungseinrichtungen (Schulen und Kindertageseinrichtungen) die für demokratische Praxis gestaltet und auf sie ausgerichtet sind;
  - Zeit und Ressourcen für Pädagoginnen und alle die an demokratischer und experimen-teller Erziehung und Bildung beteiligt sind;
  - Vertrauen in menschliche Fähigkeit

- Auch innerhalb des Bildungssystems gibt es Voraussetzungen. Die wichtigste ist sicherlich ein Perspektivenwechsel von der Fachlichkeit und Kompetenz der individuellen Erzieherin und Lehrerin hin zu einem kompetenten und professionellen öffentlichen Erziehungs- und Bildungssystem. Aus einer kritisch-ökologischen Perspektive betrachtet würde ein solches System alle Akteure auf allen Ebenen einbeziehen – eine Herausforderung für kontraproduktive Wissenshierarchien und Theorie-Praxis-Unterscheidungen!

- In Forschung und Politik gibt es einen wachsenden Konsens, dass die Fachkräfte zentral sind für die Qualität der Bildung (nicht zu vergessen, dass Qualität ein hochproblematisches Konzept ist, besonders in seiner Konnotation von technischer Machbarkeit und Steuerbarkeit sozialer und pädagogischer Praxis).

- Mit Paolo Freire, Gert Biesta, Roberto Unger und anderen pädagogischen und politischen Autoren argumentieren wir, dass öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung ein professionelles Handeln erfordert, das ebenso sehr in Werturteilen wie in Fachwissen begründet ist. Über unseren gesamten Beitrag entwickeln wir, dass die zugrundeliegenden Werte demokratische Werte sein müssen. Sie sind, so unser Argument, untrennbar verbunden mit einem spezifischen Wissensverständnis (Epistemologie) das sich im Widerspruch zu vorherrschenden 'top-down' Verständnissen von Wissensproduktion und –anwendung befindet.

- Professionelles pädagogisches Wissen ist flüchtig und immer vorläufig; es wird ständig ko- und re-konstruiert, von den Pädagogen, Kindern, Eltern und anderen, die an den konkreten Bildungsinteraktionen 'vor-Ort' beteiligt sind. Es ist im Kern demokratisch und experimentell und, wenn man das ernst nimmt, eine radikale Herausforderung für ein enges Verständnis evidenz-basierter erzieherischer Praxis.

- Im Zusammenhang demokratischer und experimenteller öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung kommt Forschung eine wichtige Rolle zu. Forschung, verstanden als eine Praxis die, wie Gilles Deleuze es formuliert, eingebunden ist in 'Gespräche' mit anderen Praktiken und zwischen Theorie und Praxis. Wir sind überzeugt, dass die Entwicklung einer demokratischen und experimentellen pädagogischen Professionalität untrennbar verbunden ist mit einem epistemologischen Wechsel hin zu Praxis-basierter Evidenz. Zusammengedacht und -gebracht in einem kritisch-ökologischen Verständnis haben demokratische und experimentelle Pädagogik, Forschung, und gemeinsames Lernen das Potential neues Wissen und neue Praktiken hervorzubringen – und sie strategisch zu nutzen, um öffentliche Erziehung und Bildung und ihre Institutionen zu verändern.

Nächste Schritte: Wie könnte ein Projekt der Veränderung beginnen?

- In diesem letzten Abschnitt nähern wir uns möglichen nächsten Schritten an – um die in diesem Beitrag angerissenen Argumente weiter zu entwickeln und Umsetzungsmöglichkeiten zu formulieren. Wie könnte ein Projekt der Veränderung beginnen?

- Aufbauend auf gesellschaftlichen Transformationstheorien, und auf den Arbeiten des amerikanischen Soziologen Erik Olin Wright identifizieren wir drei potentielle Anfangspunkte – zugleich Schlüsselkriterien – um gesellschaftliche Institutionen zu verändern:

  - Wünschbarkeit – hier geht es darum, die Werte, Ethik und Ziele zu definieren: Was sind die moralischen und utopischen Prinzipien unserer Utopie?

  - Durchführbarkeit – hier geht es um die Gestaltung neuer Politikansätze und Institutionen auf der Basis wünschbarer Prinzipien.

  - Erreichbarkeit – hier geht es um die konkreten Veränderungsprozesse und die praktische politische Arbeit und Strategien gesellschaftlicher Veränderung: „…die Frage nach den konkreten Vorschlägen für gesellschaftliche Veränderung, die den Test der Wünschbarkeit und Durchführbarkeit bestanden haben. Was bräuchte es um sie tatsächlich umzusetzen?"

- Es gibt eine solide Basis wissenschaftlicher und politischer Argumente für die Wünschbarkeit einer öffentlichen Erziehung und Bildung orientiert an Demokratie und Experimentierung. Die Priorität, so unser Argument, muss nun auf der Durchführbarkeit liegen: Insbesondere werden systemische theoretische Modelle und empirische Fallstudien benötigt.

- Diese sollten sich auf drei Bereiche konzentrieren; zusammen bilden sie einen Vorschlag für die nächsten Schritte:

  - Dokumentation: von Beispielen demokratischer und experimenteller Praxis, sowohl aktuell wie historisch, in Europa und darüber hinaus, in Schule und Kindertageseinrichtung. Wir brauchen sowohl narrative wie kritische Fallstudien um besser zu verstehen, wieso und wie solche Praktiken entstehen, welche Formen sie finden, wie sie erhalten werden können und wie (und ob!) die Erfahrungen ausgewertet wurden.

  - Entwicklung: von Umsetzungsansätzen für Demokratie und Experimentierung in öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung in folgenden Bereichen:

    - Politik- und Regierungsverantwortung (auf nationaler, regionaler und kommunaler Ebene) für Förderung und Unterstützung von Demokratie und Experimentierung in öffentlicher Erziehung und Bildung;

    - Finanzierung;

    - Evaluation;

    - Zeit und Ressourcen;

    - Verhältnis und übergreifende Zusammenarbeit von Professionen und Fachkräften , z.B. in Schule und Kindertageseinrichtungen.

  - Dialog: Schaffung von Treffpunkten für den Dialog zwischen allen, die an Demokratie und Experimentierung in Schule und Kindertageseinrichtung interessiert sind und sich dafür einsetzen. Wrights 'Real Utopian Project' liefert ein interessantes Modell: eine

Reihe von Workshops, jeweils auf eine grundlegende gesellschaftliche Institution konzentriert, zu denen „Gruppen von Wissenschaftlern eingeladen werden auf provokative Thesen zu antworten". Jeder dieser Workshops hat bisher zu einer Publikation geführt, in der Gruppen von Wissenschaftlerinnen auf einen einführenden, provokativen Beitrag antworten. Ein ähnliches Modell könnte auf das Thema dieses Beitrags übertragen werden – erweitert um politische Entscheidungsträger und andere Akteure.

Peter Moss und Mathias Urban, im November 2010

2   English Executive Summary

This paper is a contribution to the debate in Germany and beyond in Europe on future directions for education. It builds on and extends earlier work by the authors, on democratic experimentalism (Moss, 2009; Fielding & Moss, forthcoming) and early childhood workforce professionalism (Urban, 2008, 2009, 2010; Dalli & Urban 2010). At a time when managerial, technical and market approaches are increasingly influential, it argues the case for an alternative: an education based on 'democracy' and 'experimentation' as fundamental values and practices.

By arguing for an education of democracy and experimentation, the paper assumes that there are other possible values. The issue is not whether or not to have values in education, but which values and what practices follow from the choice of values?

Our starting points for this paper

- Although prevalent debates on educational effectiveness seem to be situated in a positivist paradigm (e.g. emphasising the importance of 'objective' information providing the 'factual basis for decision-making'), educational transformation cannot be merely technical. There are political and ethical choices to be made at the core of any transformative project.
- This paper contends that technical practice should always be secondary to ethical and political practice, and that 'evidence' only has meaning when contextualised and interpreted.
- Therefore we approach this paper in a spirit of respectful and constructive critique of mainstream discourses; we recognise differences of perspective and we believe that opening up such differences to dialogue can be productive – and democratic.

Outline of the paper

- This paper addresses education from birth to at least the end of compulsory schooling. Its arguments could be applied beyond education in the first years of life to the whole of lifelong learning. By taking this inclusive approach, it makes a contribution to the discussion about the relationship between pre-school and school which is a hierarchical one in many countries, but needs to be redefined as a 'strong and equal partnership' instead.
- The paper is organised in three main sections, each one addressing a fundamental question regarding democracy and experimentation in education: Why? What? How? The first section sets out the case for why democracy and experimentation should be seen as key to education in general– and to an educational project in particular. The second part explores in depth what we mean by both democracy and experimentation and considers the implications of adopting them as fundamental values in an educational project. The third section discusses how – under what conditions – a democratic and experimental education might flourish. Finally, we consider possible next steps to take the arguments further and explore the potential

and implementation of an education based on democracy and experimentation: How might a project of transformation start?

Why? Making the case for democracy and experimentation

- The meaning of concepts is neither self-evident nor neutral; it is always subject to interpretation from a multiplicity of perspectives. The same term can be inscribed with very different values, according to the interpreter's vantage point. E.g. achieving 'quality' and 'excellence' (two widely used concepts) may appear benevolent and desirable from one position while they are seen as highly problematic and potentially dangerous from another. 'Meaning' can only be partial and provisional, and is always contestable, as we explore in relation to two key concepts that often occur in discussions (holistic and education), particularly in the context of the German education and early childhood system.

- Different interpretations of concepts lead to the necessity of making choices and decisions. But how are decisions of meaning arrived at – who is involved (or excluded), and what are the processes? Asking these questions inevitably raises issues of power relations, inclusion and exclusion, diversity and difference. Among the many possible ways choices or decisions can be made, three are prevalent in modern, 21st century liberal democracies, and we discuss them in some detail:Marketisation, Managerialism, and Democratic experimentalism. Being aware of the risk of over-simplification, we do, however, identify a tendency towards managerialism in the debate, and an underlying assumption that education is a process to be managed, for the effective production of (predetermined) educational outcomes: regularly, reference is made in policies and strategies to concepts like 'defined outputs', 'educational production process', 'management instruments', management tools, and 'management architecture'.

- Having identified these critical issues in the predominant discussions, we then move on to explore in some detail the third of the approaches listed above. The paper strongly argues the case for democratic experimentalism. We build our argument on the assumption that education is an inherently political and ethical project, with many possible purposes, and with educational institutions (preschools and schools) that are public spaces in a civil society.

- A strong argument for a democratic and experimental education builds on the reference made by the Bertelsmann Stiftung (BS) to 'today's global challenges', (in fact species threatening catastrophes) some of which are
    - the increasing danger posed by proliferation of nuclear weapons
    - the global climate crisis, threatening, among others, to unleash unrest, conflict and mass-migration due to growing shortages of water, food and fuel
    - the threat to biodiversity
    - the impossibility of unlimited economic growth

- the dysfunctional economic and financial system.

- All of these challenges mean we cannot continue as we are, and they should provoke major democratic debate in all countries. In relation to education, the question of its purpose becomes even more critical and urgent. The dangers we face require spreading and deepening democratic values and practices, collaborative action and a willingness to think and act differently, trying new approaches: 'more of the same' is no longer an option.

- There are considerable opportunities, too, that arise from the current state we are in – in particular through recognising and benefiting from complexity and diversity. Education, we argue, needs to value and work with complexity and diversity. Conditions call for a democratic and experimental education that fosters critical and creative thinking, responsibility and care, solidarity and social justice and a willingness to imagine practice differently and try out new ways of doing things.

- Transparency and Hope – the possibility of renewal and invention – are further arguments for a democratic and experimental education, building on John Dewey's notion of faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgement and action if proper conditions are furnished.

What? Democracy and experimentalism as educational values

- In this section we consider in more detail what it might mean to have a democratic and experimental education in pre-school and school. We first explore some possible understandings of democracy. These go beyond the need to make collective choices about decisions of public significance and require an acknowledgement that there is not one right answer. There are always differences in perspective, interest and power. Disagreement, conflict and confrontation, we argue, indicate that democracy is alive. Democratic governance, at all levels, welcomes and makes visible differences of view and acknowledges the provisionality of all decisions. Beyond being a form of government, we argue with educational thinkers from different backgrounds that democracy is a mode of being in the world and an approach to living and relating that pervades all aspects of everyday life, not least in the school.

- Recognising difference in meaning and perspective in everyday democracy opens possibilities of contesting what Michel Foulcault calls 'dominant discourses' and 'regimes of truths'. Opening up for change, through developing critical approaches to what exists and envisioning alternative action, therefore, is a key democratic activity.

- Experimentation, as educational value and practice, is closely linked to perspectives on epistemology and learning. There is increasing acknowledgement, in critical educational debate, that knowledge is not static, passive or representational. Traditional concepts of schooling hold knowledge to be an accurate representation of the world, of a pre-existing reality. But, as educational theorists and philosophers have pointed out, this representational epistemology (leading to educational practices that try to get the child to understand a pre-existing

world) needs replacing by an 'emergenist' epistemology which is concerned with the creation of new understandings. What emerges from our active engagement with the world, in this frame of thinking, is necessarily radically new. Pedagogies of invention, we argue with theorists like Biesta and Osberg, would turn schools into places of renewal instead of replication. Trial and error (experimentation), in a fundamental sense, is the only way in which we learn anything at all. Drawing on examples from pre schools and schools, and on the experience of the municipal schools in Reggio Emilia in Northern Italian in particular, we then explore how educational institutions can support building communities of enquirers and researchers, challenging not only traditional educational practice, but ultimately the relation between theory and practice.

- Taking a final step in this section of the paper, we explore the connection between democracy and experimentalism (as they could well occur in isolation or be connected to other values instead of each other). We are proposing a link between the two that is inspired by political thinkers (e.g. Roberto Unger) arguing the case for a radical renewal of public institutions as spaces for collective experimental practice.

How? Conditions for democratic and experimental education

- In this third section of the paper, we address in some detail the conditions for democratic and experimental education.

- Educational institutions as civil forums for interaction and invention cannot exist on their own and in isolation from the wider societal context.

- Democracy and experimentation are demanding concepts that require careful attention to creating favourable conditions, if they are to flourish.

- One of the most important conditions lies in a professional educator with the ability and desire to work with democracy and experimentation.

- As with schools and preschools that embrace democracy and experimentation, this educator is part of, and actively contributing to, a civil society that in itself can and must provide a range of conditions that enable democracy and experimentation. They are:
    - **A more equal society for democracy and experimentation**
    - **A state that actively promotes democracy and experimentation**
    - **An infrastructure for democracy and experimentation**
    - **A school designed for democratic practice.**
    - **Time and resources for educators and all those involved in democratic and experimental education**
    - **Trust in human capacity and capability.**

- There are preconditions within the educational system, too. The most important being a systematic shift of perspectives from the education, competence and professionalism of the

individual practitioner to a competent and professional system. Understood as a critical ecology, such a professional system would include actors at all levels, thus challenging counter-productive epistemological hierarchies and prevailing theory/practice divides.

- There is an increasing consensus, in policy and research, that the workforce is central for the quality of education (bearing in mind that quality itself is a highly problematic concept, often linked to a discourse of technical rationality and manageability of social and educational practices).

- Alongside Freire, Biesta, Unger and other authors from both educational and social policy backgrounds we argue that education requires professional practices based on value judgements as much as on professional knowledge. Throughout this paper we have built the case for these values to be democratic values, and we argue that they are linked to a specific epistemology – a way of knowing – that contrasts the prevailing top-down models of knowledge production-and-application.

- Professional knowledge in education is transient; and it is constantly co- and re-constructed by educators, children, families and others involved in educational interactions at local level. It is democratic and experimental in its core and, taken seriously, radically questions the concept of a profession guided by evidence-based practice.

- In democratic and experimental education, research becomes a practice among others, speaking, as Gilles Deleuze puts it, with other practices and engaging in conversations between theory and practice. Hence we strongly believe that the development of a democratic and experimental educational professionalism, and the epistemological shift towards practice-based evidence are inseparable. Brought together in a critical ecology, Democratic and experimental education, research and joint learning have the potential to create new knowledges and practices – and employ them to strategically transform education and its institutions.

What next?

- In this final section we touch on possible next steps in taking forward the argument and exploring the potential and implementation of an education based on democracy and experimentation how might a project of transformation start?

- Building on theories of social transformation, and the work of American sociologist Erik Olin Wright we identify three potential starting points – and key criteria – for redesigning social institutions:

  - *Desirability* – which is about laying out values, ethics and goals: what are the moral and utopian principles of the alternative we are searching for?

  - *Viability* – which is about designing new policies and institutions based on desirable principles.

- *Achievability* – which is about the process of transformation and the practical political work of strategies for social change: "It asks of proposals for social change that have passed the test of desirability and viability, what it would take to actually implement them".

- There is a substantial body of work setting out the desirability of an education based on democracy and experimentation. The priority, we argue, should now be viability, in particular systematic theoretical models and empirical studies of cases.

- This can involve three areas of work, which together might constitute the next steps:

  - ***Documentation***: of examples – both narratives and critical case studies - of democratic and experimental policy and practice both past *and* present, both in Europe and beyond, and in both pre-school *and* school, to understand better why such practice develops, the forms it takes, how it can be sustained and what evaluations have been made.

  - ***Development***: of how democracy and experimentation might be implemented in education in areas such as:

    - *Role of government* (national, regional, local) in promoting and supporting democracy and experimentation in education;

    - *Funding of services*;

    - *Evaluation of services;*

    - *Time and space;*

    - *School workforce and relationship with pre-school workforce.*

  - ***Dialogue:*** create meeting places for dialogue between those who are interested in and engaged with democracy and experimentation in pre-school and school. Wright's Real Utopian Project provides an interesting model, based as it is on a series of workshop conferences, each based on basic institutions – property rights and the market, secondary associations, the family, the welfare state – at which "groups of scholars are invited to respond to provocative manuscripts". Each conference has resulted in an edited volume, in which groups of scholars respond to an initial and provocative essay. A similar model might be applied to education, extended perhaps to include politicians, policy makers and others.

3   Introduction

This paper is a contribution to the debate in Germany and beyond in Europe on future directions for education. It builds on and extends earlier work by the authors, on democratic experimentalism (Moss, 2009; Fielding and Moss, forthcoming) and early childhood workforce professionalism (Urban, 2008, 2009, 2010; Dalli&Urban 2010). At a time when managerial, technical and market approaches are increasingly influential, it argues the case for an alternative: an education based on 'democracy' and 'experimentation' as fundamental values and practices. By arguing for an education of democracy and experimentation, the paper acknowledges that there are other possible values. The issue is not whether or not to have values in education, but which values? And what practices follow from the choice of values?

Which values is one of a number of critical questions in educational policy and practice. Others include: What is education – what is the concept of education? What is education for – what are the purposes of education? What is knowledge and learning – how do we understand them? Who is the child and the educator, what is the school – what is our image of child, school and educator? There are no single, right answers to such essentially political and ethical questions that experts can provide calling on evidence in their support. There are only different answers that those responsible for education (and who is responsible is itself a fundamental question) must take responsibility for deciding between.

There are, therefore, at the heart of all educational policies and projects, political and ethical choices to be made. None can be simply or first and foremost technical. There is a place in education for technical practice, and an important one, and evidence including facts should be drawn on. But this paper contends that technical practice should always be secondary to ethical and political practice and that evidence only has meaning when contextualized and interpreted; in other words, facts can contribute to decision-making, but they cannot be the basis for decisions. So we approach this paper in a spirit of respectful and constructive critique, recognising that there are differences of perspective involved and believing that opening up such differences to dialogue can be productive – and democratic.

The paper is in four sections, which might be summarised by four questions. Why? What? How? What next? The first section sets out the case or rationale for **why** democracy and experimentation might be considered key players in education in general and in any educational project in particular. The second considers in more depth **what** we mean by democracy and experimentation and some of the implications of adopting them as fundamental values in an educational project. The third section goes into **how** – under what conditions - a democratic and experimental education

might be made to work well, since no one can imagine that demanding requirements like democracy and experimentation will flourish without careful attention being given to creating favourable conditions (and even then, like any approach, it will never work perfectly). Among these conditions, one of the most important is a professional educator with the ability and desire to work with democracy and experimentation. The final section – **what next**? – suggests some possible next steps to take forward democratic experimentalism in education.

As a final word by way of introduction, this paper takes a broad view. It addresses education from birth to the end of compulsory schooling. Indeed, its arguments could be applied beyond education in these first years of life to the whole of lifelong learning. By adopting this inclusive approach, it makes a contribution to the important discussion of the relationship between 'pre-school' (a generic term we adopt to cover all institutions for children below compulsory school age, including kindergarten in the case of Germany) and school, a relationship that is often defined as pre-school preparing children for school and enhancing school performance, while assuming an unchanging and dominant school. The end result of this relationship may readily be what has been termed 'schoolification', the pushing down into pre-school of the means and ends of a conservative school system.

However, one of the other relationships available to pre-school and school, which we find particularly interesting, is what the OECD *Starting Strong* reports term 'a strong and equal partnership' (OECD, 2001), and what a Swedish report describes as "the vision of a pedagogical meeting place" where pre-school and school come together to construct new and shared understandings of the child, knowledge, learning and other important concepts (Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi, 1994). We might add that pre-school and school could use such meeting places to deliberate on critical questions and to negotiate provisional answers, including shared educational values, such as democracy and experimentation, as well as to exchange experience of working with such shared values. Part of the appeal of a mutual and dialogic relationship is that the school sector might be exposed to some of the highly innovative thinking and practice currently to be found in parts of the pre-school sector, for example experimentation with new theorists and theories, extensive experience of project work and pedagogical documentation, and innovatory approaches to diversity and participation; while the school sector may well have equally rich experience to share. Both sectors also have rich historical traditions, which include important roles for democracy and experimentation. Just as both sectors may learn from each others' contemporary work, so too contemporary educational practices and policies in all educational fields can be enriched from drawing on the legacy of these traditions.

A major problem of education today is the border between pre-school and school, a border that affects not only children but also the flow of ideas and experience. The concept of 'preparation for school' may breach that border. But it does so in the manner of an imperial power invading a client state rather than equals freely choosing to know each other better and to work together.

4   Why? Making the case for democracy and experimentation

In this section we consider the case or rationale for adopting democracy and experimentation as key concepts and values in education. Our starting point is the premise that education is first and foremost a political and ethical project, whose meaning, purpose and practice can never be universally and permanently agreed because there are always multiple perspectives on them. We go on to argue that current conditions, transparency and the need for hope all require strong democratic and experimental approaches, in educational policy making, practice and evaluation.

4.1   The contestable meaning of concepts

The meaning of concepts is neither self-evident nor neutral. Meaning is always subject to interpretation, and from a multiplicity of positions or perspectives; there is no objective, detached position capable of delivering incontestable, universally valid and stable meanings. Different meanings from different perspectives will inscribe the same term with very different value. What may seem a wholly desirable and benevolent concept from one position will appear a potentially dangerous and problematic concept from another; see, for example, the critical interpretations of 'quality' (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007) and 'excellence' (Readings, 1996), concepts widely used in education and beyond as if they were self-evident, neutral and unproblematic. In sum, any meaning put forward is bound to be partial, contestable and provisional.

Let us develop this line of argument by taking, as examples, two concepts that often occur in discussions: 'holistic' and 'education'. Our point here is not to take sides in this or that educational debate. It is to highlight that there are always sides to be taken: no concept is ever neutral and universally agreed.

The term 'holistic' can conjure up an idea of addressing all aspects of the individual and her development – not only the cognitive, but the emotional, the aesthetic, the ethical, the physical and so on, which might also be seen as relating to ideas such as Howard Gardner's 'multiple intelligences'. Some are critical of education in Germany and elsewhere for placing too much emphasis on cognitive competencies and for concentrating on learners' shortcomings as opposed to their abilities. Such critics would highlight the concern of 'holistic' education with broad goals, for example promoting health and general well-being, ensuring social and political inclusion, increasing civic engagement and enhancing job prospects.

The term, too, can carry the idea of interconnectedness, so that learning requires synergy between all aspects of the individual; at its simplest, an emotionally troubled or unhealthy child will not learn

well. 'Holistic' might also imply a concern to see and work with the learner in relation to her wider world, a world of family, community and beyond, in which education occurs both in formal settings (such as the school) and informal settings (such as the family). 'Holistic' might, too, be applied to the school, not just the individual, and to the idea of the school as a multi-purpose public institution, offering a range of projects and services to children, families and local communities – an idea expressed in terms such as 'extended schools' or 'full service schools'.

Developing this theme further, 'holistic' might also apply to a school that works to break down the borders between subjects, emphasising connectedness. Vea Vecchi, an *atelierista* from Reggio Emilia[1], links both notions of 'holistic' – the individual and the institutional – drawing on the work of Edgar Morin:

> I agree with Edgar Morin when he says the problem is not so much opening up the boundaries of the various disciplines, but making sure these boundaries are not created. When we are born we are a whole, and the whole of our senses strains to relate with the world around us in order to understand it. Very quickly, however, we find ourselves 'cut into slices'...(forcing) us to pursue knowledge on separate oaths...We need to reflect seriously on how much individual and social damage is being caused by education and culture which prefer to separate than to work on connections (Vecchi, 2004, p.18).

So there are a number of variations of meaning already. Moreover, from some perspectives, some of the meanings attached to 'holistic' education can seem quite problematic. If 'holistic' implies a belief in a stable, coherent and essential subject, then poststructuralists would doubt the feasibility (or desirability) of such a humanist construct, seeing the subject as having no unity, essence or integral identity (Olssen, 2003). Foucauldians would suspect 'holistic education' as a technology for better 'governing the soul', the term 'soul' here being used "to refer to aspects of humanity that were previously sacrosanct but that have recently been constructed as objects of physiological and regulatory apparatuses…the innermost qualities of being human" (Fendler, 2001, p.123) – qualities such as feelings, desires, fears, and pleasures. Indeed, Fendler identifies 'whole child education' as one of a three 'disciplinary discourses' whose 'technologies' are used to construct 'the educated

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[1] *Atelieristas*, whose background is often in the visual arts, work alongside teachers in Reggio Emilia's municipal schools, often from an *atelier* (workshop) situated in a school where they support and develop children's and adults' visual languages as part of the complex process of knowledge building. Their contribution to experimentation is described by Vea Vecchi: "because the atelier is in contact with the world of art, architecture and design and because the atelierista often has sensitive antennae for contemporary issues, it is her task to receive and bring these interesting cultural flows into school, and where possible, rework them in appropriate ways so that they light up areas which can be used for experimentation with children' (Vecchi, 2010, p.126).

subject' in a period of post-Fordist, flexible capitalism[2]. 'Holistic education', from this perspective can be understood as a means for the effective construction of the soul in a subject suited to the prevailing form of economic relationship.

The concept 'education' has millennia of debate about meaning behind it, including a rich and sustained literature examining and debating the meanings of the German term *Bildung.* Some of the complexities of the possible meanings of this concept can be seen in the tensions, not resolved to this day, arising from the two distinct historical roots of German early childhood institutions – education in its broadest sense in Fröbel's Kindergarten and care for disadvantaged and impoverished children in the *Kinderbewahranstalt.* The optimistic reading of the distinct tasks given to early childhood institutions in policy documents and legal frameworks is that the German kindergarten, today, genuinely integrates different social functions and serves multiple purposes. This view is reflected in the wording of official documents as well as in the self-image of the sector: the purpose of early childhood institutions is to provide the triad of *Bildung, Erziehung und Betreuung* which are seen as inseparable.

From a less optimistic perspective, it could be argued that the triad is little more than an umbrella for three distinct approaches, which, in consequence lead to different, often contradictory practices. While *Betreuung* easily translates into English as 'care' (although there are of course many possible understandings of care, in the public realm and in relation to the upbringing of young children), it is interesting to see the conceptual distinction between the first two parts of the triad – *Bildung* and *Erziehung*. Educationalists from English-speaking countries with a strong tradition of 'schoolified' early childhood institutions (*pre*-schools) have always struggled to understand the concept of *Bildung*. Rooted in the tradition of humanism and enlightenment, and often linked to 18th century educational theorist Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Bildung* refers to the *process* of an individual striving to reach their full potential as well as to an *ideal* – having, for instance, reached a state of reflexivity towards one's self, others, and the world (Luth, 1998). In German, the verb to the noun *Bildung* is *bilden*. It is a transitive verb, i.e. the action of *bilden* always has an object, a *something* or *someone* it is directed to. Moreover, in the context of educational philosophy and debate, *bilden* is almost exclusively used as a reflexive verb (*sich bilden*). Hence *Bildung*, as a philosophical concept is inseparable from the individual; it began as an individualistic, not a communal, public project. Needless to say that, historically, the individuals in question were usually male, well-off members of the bourgeoisie.

In common speech, *Bildung* in Germany has become a synonym for schooling, a gross misrepresentation of the concept as practices in mainstream schools are often narrow and scarcely

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[2] The other two are 'developmentally appropriate curricula' and 'interactive pedagogy'

dedicated to children reaching their potential in other than cognitive domains. In current German early childhood discourses, however, *Bildung* largely represents the holistic, reformatory side of the early childhood tradition, and understandings of children as active learners and meaning-makers. It is increasingly conceptualised in a social-constructivist and socio-cultural frame of thinking, linking humanistic *Bildungstheorie* to Deweyan and Vygotskyan theories.

While there has been a renewed interest in the re-interpretation of *Bildung* in early childhood in Germany in recent years (Laewen, 2002; Laewen and Andres, 2002), there has been little critical debate about the second conceptual pillar of the German early childhood system – *Erziehung*. The term translates as 'education' and, if placed in a continuum with *Bildung*, would represent the societal, or adult aspects of the triad. Education is to do with generational processes of transmitting cultural norms and values, transfer of curricular content etc. It is, in short, what adults do *to* children in a purposeful way, usually in institutions set up to serve exactly this and no other purpose. Siegfried Bernfeld, Marxist psychoanalyst and student of Siegmund Freud, defines education as the *societal response to the fact of development* (Bernfeld, 1925, 1985). Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1979, 1980) offers an even more critical analysis. Schools, alongside other institutions like hospitals and prisons, must be analysed from a perspective of power relations, and understood as highly effective means of normalisation and confinement introduced to western societies from the seventeenth century.

There are, however, quite different educational paradigms in different cultures. The French concept of *éducation*, based on the ideal of *raison*, aims at leading children from a state of savageness to being reasonable members of the (lay) state: the *citoyen* imbued with republican virtues. English 'education' is more interested in forming children into useful members of society, their usefulness being determined by the assumed future needs of the labour market (these are, of course, undue simplifications). While different in their cultural meanings, both educational paradigms are grounded in the western projects of modernity, liberalism and capitalism. They might well be at odds with other interpretations of relationships between generations, between individual and community, and between private and public in many parts of this world. In fact, we know they are (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2008).

To summarise – and to use an overly simplified picture for the last time – from one perspective *Bildung* comprises the entirety of children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and creative activities for making sense of their world. *Erziehung* refers to children as recipients of what adults do *to* them, purposefully, in educational settings. *Betreuung*, then, could be understood as providing secure spaces in which – at best – *Bildung* and *Erziehung* can unfold.

Discussion of the meaning of education, such as we have just touched on, draw us into asking, discussing and seeking to answer a number of critical questions, questions we must identify, deliberate on and decide before moving to solutions. Not only what is our concept of education? But what is the purpose of education – what is it for? What are the fundamental values of education? What is our image of the child or the school or the educator? What do we mean by terms such as learning and knowledge? How does education relate to care, or broader concepts such as 'well-being'?

To illustrate how such explicit questioning can play an important role in the renewal of education, we will draw on the example of Reggio Emilia, the northern Italian city that has developed a world-famous education in its 'municipal schools' for young children[3]. The starting point in this educational project of more than 40 years was the question 'what is our image of the child?' To which Reggio Emilia has chosen to answer the 'rich child' – "strong, powerful, competent and, most of all connected to adults and other children" (Malaguzzi, 1993, p.10) – born with a hundred languages[4], and also a citizen and subject of rights. Their understanding or image of the school is as a place of encounter for citizens, both children and adults, and a collaborative workshop or laboratory for communal experimentation, research and the creation of new thinking and knowledge. The educator is a researcher and experimenter, engaged (like children) in the creation of new knowledge (Rinaldi, 2005a).

The fundamental values of Reggio Emilia include democracy and dialogue, subjectivity and uncertainty, border crossing and experimentation. Learning is understood as the co-construction of knowledge through processes of meaning making in relation with others, processes that involve theory building unconstrained by predetermined outcomes. Carlina Rinaldi, a leading figure in Reggio Emilia's pedagogical work, explains how understanding – meaning making – for children and adults

- means being able to develop an interpretive 'theory', a narration that gives meaning to events and objects of the world. Our theories are provisional, offering a satisfactory explanation that can be continuously reworked; but they represent something more than simply an idea or a group of ideas. They must please us and convince us, be useful,

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[3] The municipality uses the term 'school' for centres for children from birth to 6 years because it wants to contest and reclaim the meaning of 'school'.

[4] The 'hundred languages of children' refers "to the different ways children (human beings) represent, communicate and express their thinking in different media and symbolic systems; languages therefore are the many fonts or geneses of knowledge" (Vecchi, 2010, p.10). These many linguistic possibilities range from mathematical and scientific languages to the poetic languages, "forms of expression strongly characterized by expressive or aesthetic aspects such as music, song, dance or photography" (ibid.).

and satisfy our intellectual, affective, and aesthetic needs (the aesthetics of knowledge). In representing the world, our theories represent us.

- Moreover, if possible, our theories must please and be attractive to others. Our theories need to be listened to by others. Expressing our theories to others makes it possible to transform a world not intrinsically ours into something shared. Sharing theories is a response to uncertainty (Rinaldi, 2005a, p.64).

These understandings of learning and knowledge have shaped their pedagogical practices, which they refer to as 'a pedagogy of relationships and listening'.

Vea Vecchi, another leading educator in this civic educational experience, returns to her earlier theme of connectedness when she describes the questions and choices confronting all those with responsibility for education:

In work like mine, which deals with education, *one of the objectives should be clarifying what kind of knowledge we are working for*. Perhaps all this has been said many times before and by authoritative people, but that does not prevent us from taking up the theme again: how the development of thinking is limited by systems of teaching that tend to separate the different disciplines; how by working in this compartmentalised way we come to break reality up into little pieces and make a more general, more complete understanding of things more difficult; how this division poses obstacles to opportunities for grasping elements capable of establishing connections which constitute the support, the strong links, in comprehensive networks of knowledge… *[S]chools need to consciously take a position on which knowledge they intend to promote* - in an idea of teaching that chooses not to transmit circumscribed 'truths' in various 'disciplines', but rather to stand by children's sides together constructing contexts in which they can explore their own ideas and hypotheses individually or in groups and discuss them with friends or teachers (Vecchi, 2010, p.28; emphasis added).

We have dwelt at some length on Reggio Emilia as an example of the innovative and relevant work undertaken in the preschool field about which the compulsory school field may be unaware. But we have also done so because it illustrates in a well documented way how education confronts all those taking responsibility for education with many choices: choices that are about how to answer critical questions, including what meanings to attach to concepts that are central to education but which can have no generally agreed and permanently stable meanings; choices that are first and foremost political and ethical and on which schools, and citizens, 'need consciously (to) take a position'. And taking a position means, *inter alia*, interrogating and deciding on meaning.

4.2   Deciding on meaning

If the meaning of central concepts such as 'holistic' and 'education' is neither self evident nor neutral, but if it is also the case that some decisions about meaning need to be made (even if provisionally), then what is to be done? We can extend this dilemma to ask how we arrive at answers to other critical questions, including those with which we began this paper. How are decisions to be made? By whom? Through what processes? How are these foundations of education to be constructed, even before we move to matters of policy and practice?

We are confronted by a number of unavoidable and related issues: power relations; inclusion and exclusion; multiplicity of perspectives about values and purposes arising from diversities within any population; a "dimension of antagonism inherent in human relations" (Mouffe, 2000, p.101); and how to negotiate difference. Put another way, we are faced with education being an unavoidably political and ethical project, requiring choices to be made that involve many and diverse interests, understandings, values and beliefs.

There are various ways that such choices or decisions can be made. Some are overtly political and ethical, while others seek to ignore or deny the political and ethical dimensions of education. We will not explore all of these ways, such as turning to some forum of supposedly wise men and women, looking to a supreme leader, or relying on handed down tradition. Instead, we will assert that there are three main decision-making ways that might be considered in early 21st century European liberal democracies (though it would be good to extend this repertoire if others are proposed).

1. *Marketisation*: decisions are left to individuals, whose preferences and (individual) choices are coordinated and implemented through the invisible hand of the market to produce a diverse range of providers and services aimed at responding to parental circumstances, preferences and choices.

2. *Managerialism*: decisions are based on managerial methods (e.g. mission statements, aims and targets, cost-benefit exercises) informed by positivistic researchers acting as expert technicians who claim objective knowledge of what is true, including correct goals and what works.

3. *Democratic experimentalism*: decisions are based on collective (democratic) choices made in a variety of forums, stimulating and informed by experimentation practiced at all levels, from the national to the individual school.

Like all classificatory systems, this over-simplifies. To take an obvious example, democracy itself takes many forms and has many meanings. Is it, for example, understood as the ideal of a rational consensus arrived at through inclusive forms of deliberation? Or is democracy understood as providing a context for recognising and living with value plurality and the possibility that human beings can flourish in many ways of life, a democracy that supports a *modus vivendi*? John Gray argues for the latter as more suited to a world where there are many values and forms of life in which humans can flourish:

> The aim of *modus vivendi* cannot be to still the conflict of values. It is to reconcile individuals and ways of life honouring conflicting values to a life in common. We do not need common values in order to live together in peace. We need common institutions in which many forms of life can coexist (Gray, 2009, p.25).

This discussion opens up many questions, not least about the relationship between democracy and education and the meaning of 'democratic experimentalism', to which we will return in the next section. For the moment, the point is to recognise the reductive dangers of categorising.

Another such danger is setting up false oppositions. For example, marketisation in education is, in practice, often accompanied by strong managerialism, creating competition in service delivery together with strong regulatory systems dictating what services have to teach and deliver, including prescriptive outcomes (for a discussion of this mix of choice and standardisation, and possible causes, see Apple, 2004). Democratic experimentalism, an approach for which we argue in this paper, regards management and 'technical research'[5] as having an important role to play, but considers that role to be subservient to political and ethical considerations so it does not become the tail wagging the dog. This relationship is expressed by Rinaldi speaking about the system of municipal schools in Reggio Emilia: 'In organisation, every element is inspired by a value; organisation expresses a value and is not an end in itself' (2005, p.159).

However, despite such overlaps and alliances, we contend that these three responses point to fundamental differences in how education can be defined, developed and governed, including the allocation of resources. It is also the case that 1 and 2 are, today, more influential than 3 in educational discourses, at international, national and local levels. Marketisation and managerialism are what Foucault termed 'dominant discourses', making truth claims for their particular positions and shaping what can be said or done. Under this governing regime, the solution to 'good education' is

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[5] 'In the *technical role*, research is a producer of means, strategies, and techniques to achieve given ends…(but) there is at least one other way in which research can inform practice. This is by providing a different way of understanding and imagining social reality. He refers to the latter as the *cultural role* of research (Biesta, 2007, p.18-19).

held to be self-evident - well-functioning markets and effective management (competition and leadership); while 'good education' itself is understood as more of the same only done more effectively and efficiently – higher standards assessed by more testing and examinations. Education, this discourse implies, is a process to be both commodified and managed, for the more effec-effective production by preschool or school – implicitly understood as a factory or processing plant - of predetermined outcomes.

This highly instrumental understanding of learning and knowledge, with the central value attached to the efficient reproduction of pre-defined goals, and not allowing anything untoward to occur, is very far from the educational thinking and practice of Reggio Emilia, and indeed many other educational projects and thinkers. A choice has been made, but not acknowledged.

4.3   The case for democratic experimentalism

This paper explores the case for adopting the third of the responses outlined above (though not to be confused with the 'third way' because there could be many more than three alternatives and democratic experimentalism does not seek to steer a path – or 'triangulate' a position in the Blair-Clinton parlance - between marketisation and managerialism). Here, we put forward a five part case for 'democratic experimentalism'. We consider the key concepts – 'democracy' and 'experimentalism' – in greater depth and detail in the next section. But for the moment, we note that democracy and experimentalism constitute both values and practices, and that they can apply equally to decision making about educational policy and organisation *and* to the everyday practice of education in the school and classroom.

a)   ***Education is, first and foremost, political and ethical***. We have already set out the first part of the case for adopting an approach of democratic experimentalism: *education is an inherently political and ethical project*, involving different understandings, values and interests, from individuals and groups positioned in different paradigmatic, theoretical, social and identity positions. There never can be one right answer to the basic critical questions: What is education? What is it for? How should we practice it?

So why not leave it to the market to sort out? Why not let the preferences and decisions of many individual consumers – parents needing education for their children – decide all aspects of education, in an exercise in consumer sovereignty? Because we understand education to be important

not only as a private benefit for individual children and parents, but also as a public good, with collective interests at stake. The wider society and local communities – the population at large - have an interest in and a responsibility for the education of children. The market is unable to encompass these externalities of public interest, common responsibility and collective benefit.

Taking this understanding of education further, we understand (though we recognise others may not share our understanding) schools to be public spaces and key social institutions: places of encounter where all citizens for an important part of their lives come together; and collaborative workshops which are capable of many collective purposes and projects, including:

- Learning
- Researching
- Providing family support
- Building community solidarity
- Sustaining cultures and languages
- Developing economy (including 'childcare')
- Promoting gender and other equalities
- Practicing democracy and active citizenship.

As productive public spaces, schools create 'ideas, images, knowledge, communication, cooperation, and affective relations…social life itself' (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p.146). And as this 'immaterial production' depends on cooperation, collaboration and communication – the common – so should the common share in the benefits of such production.

We do not believe the market can effectively promote and govern a public space and social institution, any more than it can represent and ensure the public good. That is the role of democratic politics. Nor can the market ensure that the benefits of immaterial production are shared for the common good. Education, in our view, should be firmly situated in the public realm and subject to democratic deliberation, not left to domestic deliberation and consumer choice however strongly managed.

b)   ***The dire state we are in.*** The second part of our argument is that an education that is democratic and experimental is best suited to contemporary conditions, in particular the unparalleled challenges facing not only individual families, communities and countries, but even our future as a species. What are these challenges and what might the solutions be, internationally, nationally and locally? With the intensification of globalisation, much political attention has been paid to a certain economic dimension, the challenge of individual coun-

tries remaining competitive to survive in an increasingly ruthless global marketplace, with the education of 'flexible souls' being one solution: "across the political spectrum of governments, pursuing international competitiveness and a rising GDP is still seen as panacea for social, economic and environmental problems" (New Economic Foundation, 2010, p.18). The economic theme, of course, is not new; creating a workforce 'fit for purpose' has played an important role since the state first became involved in education, even though the economy's demands on education change.

But today, there are fundamentally new challenges, challenges which have merged or intensified in recent years and which put our very survival as societies, and even as a species, into question: nuclear proliferation, resource depletion, environmental degradation and, perhaps above all, climate change. Such challenges have led:

- the Society of Atomic Scientists to move the minute hand of the Doomsday Clock two minutes closer to midnight, where it now reads five minutes to midnight, 'reflecting global failures to solve the problems posed by nuclear weapons and the climate crisis' (http://www.thebulletin.org/content/media-center/announcements/2007/01/17/doomsday-clock-moves-two-minutes-closer-to-midnight);

- the UK government's chief scientist, Professor John Beddington, to predict that growing shortages of water, food and fuel will create a 'perfect storm' by around 2030 that "threaten(s) to unleash public unrest, cross-border conflicts and mass migration as people flee from the worst-affected regions" (Sample, 2009).

- the UK government's Sustainable Development Commission to conclude that

    a world in which things simply go on as usual is already inconceivable. But what about a world in which nine billion people all aspire to the level of affluence achieved in the OECD nations? Such an economy would need to be 15 times the size of this one by 2050 and 40 times bigger by the end of the century. What does such an economy look like? What does it run on? Does it really offer a credible vision for a shared and lasting prosperity? (Jackson, 2009, p.6).

- an EC report on the world in 2025 to argue that

    biodiversity raises a global security problem. It needs a systemic approach, shows a complexity difficult to handle, and is presently out of the scope of existing economic

approaches. It leads also to a different attitude towards nature, the one of the gardener. The cultural shift from an exploiter attitude to a planetary gardening attitude (Gaudin, 2009).

These challenges (if 'challenge' is the right word for what are, in effect, species-threatening catastrophes) are compounded by a dysfunctional economic and financial system. The economic system is based on endless growth driven by "the production and consumption of novelty" (Jackson, 2009, p.9), yet "unending global economic growth...is not possible, but also neither desirable nor necessary" (New Economic Foundation, 2010, p.124). While an increasingly global and unregulated financial system has prospered on (in the words of the Adair Turner, Director of the UK agency for financial services regulation) 'socially useless' activities before imploding in a catastrophic collapse which, to date, has called for $14 trillion of public money "to support the banks in the UK, US and euro-area during the current crisis…(dwarfing) any previous state support of the banking system" (Alessandri and Haldane, 2009, p.2).

The irony – or perhaps tragedy – is that the system has not brought health, happiness and a sense of well-being to offset its high environmental costs and chronic economic instability: quite the reverse. Increases in material living standards *in poor countries* do "result in substantial improvements both in objective measures of wellbeing like life expectancy, and in subjective ones like happiness." But as countries "join the ranks of the affluent developed countries, further rises in income count for less and less" (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, p.8). In short, there is a law of diminishing returns: after a certain point, the benefits of increased wealth simply peter out to be replaced by growing discontents. Indeed,

> it is a remarkable paradox that, at the pinnacle of human material and technical achievement, we find ourselves anxiety-ridden, prone to depression, worried about how others see us, unsure of our friendships, driven to consume and with little or no community life…we seek comfort in over-eating, obsessive shopping and spending, or become prey to excessive alcohol, psychoactive medicines and illegal drugs' (ibid., p. 3).

Elsewhere, the economist Professor Richard Layard has similarly noted that well-being has not improved in richer countries, with no evidence that 'developed' societies are any happier today than they were 50 years ago. In short, 'ever-increasing consumption is not making us any happier' (New Economic Foundation, 2009, p.23).

The unprecedented and deadly scale of the challenges facing humankind and its societies is encapsulated by Edgar Morin (1999) when he speaks of humanity having entered a 'Damoclean

phase', when it must live with the possibility of self-destruction. What do these 'challenges' - that can be summarised as 'we cannot continue as we are' - mean for the education system? The question should provoke a major democratic debate in all countries, since it raises profound issues about the future of education. Here we offer three tentative answers.

First, the challenges make the critical question – what is the purpose of education? – even more critical and very urgent. Richard Aldrich, a historian of education, offers one response to the question. Applying a historical perspective, which identifies past rationales for education (for example, education for salvation, education for the state, education for progress), Aldrich argues that the current unprecedented situation, where the very future of our species is at issue, calls for "a blueprint for education for survival in the present and future" (2010). Being a winner in the global economy seems less appealing if the prize is a wasteland.

Second, what do they say about today's education? For many of today's 'challenges' are the product of the best educated men (and some women) of their generations. Speaking of the current financial crisis, Vince Cable, an economist and minister in the new UK coalition government, observes that "a generation of brilliant young graduates with advanced numeracy has been persuaded, by lavish incentives, to devote their intelligence to financial inventiveness, rather than the more tedious and less lucrative alternatives of the laboratory or classroom" (Cable, 2009, p.26). Current education at its most successful in its own terms has produced an elite of highly literate and numerate people, highly knowledgeable in their own subject area – but who also are apparently lacking an ethic of care, a sense of responsibility and moderation, a modicum of wisdom, any awareness of context or any understanding of the connectedness of things. Instead their education seems to have imbued them with greed, short- sightedness, a will to mastery and a boundless self-confidence. They illustrate the failure of the education system, as it is today, to equip people with what Edgar Morin argues are essential capabilities, to think in context and to think the complex: "we need thinking capable of relinking disjointed notions and compartmentalised areas of knowledge…Thinking that recognises its incompleteness and can deal with uncertainty, the unforeseen, interdependencies and inter and retro-actions" (1999, pp.130-1).

Thirdly, the dire situation confronting us makes it more essential than ever for educational decision making and practice to foreground democracy and experimentation. As Shah and Goss observe, "(o)ur society faces challenges where we need to act collaboratively more than ever. We need to deepen democracy through more deliberative and participative democratic mechanisms which spread democracy into the 'everyday' of our lives" (2007, p.26). This democratic imperative should be matched by a willingness to think differently and to try new approaches; more of the same, only better, is clearly not an option. An education that values democracy and experimentation is, we

would argue, a necessary, though by no means sufficient, condition for finding good solutions to the challenges confronting us; and we need more than ever an open, participatory and creative decision making process about the meaning and practice of education in a threatened world.

c)   **Not missing the boat.** Although today's conditions are unprecedented in the dangers they threaten, they also afford considerable opportunities, in particular through recognising, working with and benefiting from complexity and diversity. The world today is more complex and diverse; and its inhabitants have a better appreciation of this and of its potential. But in education (and also elsewhere), we face an apparent contradiction:

> the more we seem to know about the complexity of learning, children's diverse strategies and multiple theories [of] knowledge, the more we seek to impose learning strategies and curriculum goals that reduce the complexities and diversities of learning and knowing. The more complex things become the more we seem to desire processes of reduction and thus control, but such reduction strategies might simultaneously shut out the inclusion and justice we want to achieve (Lenz Taguchi, 2009, p.8).

Education needs to welcome, value and work with complexity and diversity and this, we would argue, is most likely in a regime of democratic experimentalism, since democracy (or at least, as noted above, the *modus vivendi* concept of liberal democracy) assumes plurality rather than consensus, and experimentalism relishes the exploration of complexity.

What contemporary conditions call for today is a democratic and experimental education that fosters critical and creative thinking, responsibility and care, solidarity and social justice, an understanding of complexity and interdependence, and a willingness to acquire different understandings, imagine practice differently and try out new ways of doing things.

d)   **Making education visible.** The fourth part of the rationale for democratic experimentalism is the role it can play in developing a 'transparent' education, an education all aspects of which are more visible to all citizens. At one level, transparency is important for ensuring that public money is well spent on achieving public goals; it is necessary for ensuring public accountability and confidence. It is a means of monitoring education, for identifying inadequate education and for action to be initiated to address such inadequacy. But at another level, transparency is important for democracy itself. Democracy should be judged on its capacity to make practices and their outcomes visible and, therefore, contestable; and such visibility is itself critical to a well functioning democracy, judged in terms of active and widespread citi-

zen participation.

In discussing transparency, it is important to distinguish between the production of information and how that information is understood and used – or, put another way, the relationship of information to knowledge. From a market or managerial perspective, the question of information is clear. Neutral and unambiguous information can be objectively generated through effective information systems and technical research. It can then be made available, for example to consumers or managers, who translate it directly and without any mediation into knowledge for rationally determining action (e.g. individual choice of schools in the market by parents, allocation of incentives or penalties by management). Transparency in this market or managerial perspective usually involves separation of customer or manager from everyday practice, to avoid the adverse effects on rational decision making of the subjectivity, complexity and messiness of life. It relies on the presentation of information in the form of abstract numbers (e.g. ratings, scores, sales) that purport to summarise conditions and performance, enabling rational decision making in consumption or management.

In this reading, good information objectively processed provides a true account of the world, offering a simple lens through which the world is revealed. It is the key to mastering that world through enabling the effective production of predefined outcomes. This is transparency understood as revelation, through technical means, of objective truth. The ambition is for decisions based on facts. It is underpinned by a positivistic paradigm[6] that holds "it is possible to measure, represent, predict and control knowledge of the social world" (St.Pierre and Pillow, 2000, p.6).

Transparency is important, too, from a democratic perspective. But it places equal importance on process and outcome, looks for both predetermined and unexpected outcomes, and assumes that information always needs interpretation. Information does not translate directly into knowledge, but contributes to a process of co-constructing knowledges; for, as Morin says, "all knowledge, as well as all perception, is an act of translation and reconstruction, that is interpretation" (1999, p.101). This act should involve democratic deliberation, including dialogue, contestation, reflection and evaluation.

But transparency in a democratic approach goes beyond collecting and interpreting information. It calls, too, for engagement of parents, managers, politicians, children – in other words, citizens – with everyday practice. This means making practice visible to them in various ways, to deepen understanding, to provoke thought, and to contest and evaluate it. The 'customer' or the 'manager' relies on someone else to summarise practice and measure predefined outcomes, and present

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[6] By 'positivist paradigm' we refer to a mindset that assumes the world can be truly known through scientific enquiry; that social science is no different to natural science, and can reveal natural laws; that nothing can be known unless it is quantifiable; and that increasing knowledge is matched by a convergence of values and goals (Gray, 2009).

them in a supposedly objective and definitive format, often expressed as numbers. The 'citizen', by contrast, must engage first hand with practice and outcomes, must struggle with the complexity, uncertainties and messiness of practice and outcomes, must take responsibility for interpreting and evaluating practice and outcome. Rinaldi captures this dilemma in her discussion of the value of subjectivity:

> There is no objective point of view that can make observation neutral. Point of view is always subjective, and observation is always partial. But this is a strength, not a limitation...(W)e 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 (Rinaldi, 2005, p.126).

This idea of transparency as a democratic practice engaged with the everyday and concrete, an exercise in what Patti Lather terms 'rigorous subjectivity', is central to the tool of pedagogical documentation, developed in the municipal schools in Reggio Emilia, and today practiced in many countries and many centres. Here, the biographer of Loris Malaguzzi, the first director of early childhood services in Reggio Emilia and one of the initiators of pedagogical documentation, spells out the connections, and the important part played by transparency – or 'visibility' - in education as a political and ethical project:

> Documenting what has been observed in work together with children is one of the keys to Malaguzzi's philosophy. Behind this practice, I believe, is the ideological and political concept of a transparent school and transparent education and the aesthetic idea of offering a relational image of childhood through uniting process with content. *A political idea also emerges, which is that what schools do must have public visibility*; thus 'giving back' to the city what the city has invested in them….

> Documentation in all its various forms also represents an extraordinary tool for dialogue, for exchange and for sharing. For Malaguzzi it means the possibility to discuss and to dialogue 'everything with everyone' (teachers, auxiliary staff, cooks, families, administrators and citizens. This aspect confers a strong identity on the Reggio project. In fact sharing opinions by means of documentation presupposes being able to discuss real, concrete things – not just theories or words, about which it is possible to reach easy and naïve agreement (Hoyuelos, 2004, p.7; emphasis added)

Pedagogical documentation, therefore, makes the school and its practices more transparent, or publicly visible. The purpose is not to reveal the truth directly, an unrealisable ambition; it is to ena-

ble citizens, of all ages, to engage in democratic processes of dialogue, interpretation, learning and, if necessary, judgement.

This discussion about information and knowledge, visibility and transparency is central to assessing the place and value of 'evidence based' analysis or practice. In an important article about the increasingly dominant role of 'evidence based practice' in education (summed up in the question 'what works?'), Gert Biesta provides a critique of the concept and the ways it has been promoted and implemented in the field of education. He questions the comparability between medicine (the home of evidence-based practice) and education. Then, drawing on Dewey's transactional theory of knowing, he considers the role of knowledge in educational practice, arguing that experimentation is the only way to learn since prior research can only tells us what *has* worked, not what *will* work, providing some understanding of possibilities but providing no substitute for professional judgement in unique situations. But his third and perhaps most central argument is that the evidence-based discourse has prioritised a technical role for research, focused on means, strategies and techniques to achieve given ends. The evidence-based approach overlooks the cultural role of research, which is concerned with purposes and ends and plays an important role in helping people to acquire different understandings and imagine practice differently.

In conclusion he argues that the evidence-based approach, which might be equated with a naïve approach to transparency, suffers from a democratic deficit:

> A democratic society is, in other words, characterized by the existence of an open and informed discussion about problem definitions and the aims and ends of our educational endeavours. Thus the fact that the whole discussion about evidence-based practice seems only to have technical expectations about the practical role of research is a worrisome sign from the point of view of democracy…it is disappointing, to say the least, that the whole discussion about evidence-based practice is focused on technical questions – questions about 'what works' – while forgetting the need for critical inquiry into normative and political questions about what is educationally desirable…From the point of view of democracy, an exclusive emphasis on 'what works' will simply not work (Biesta, 2007, pp.20, 21, 22)

In sum, then, the case for what might be termed a democratic approach to transparency is that it avoids the pitfalls of what might be termed naïve transparency, a belief that knowledge equates with more and better information that will lead inevitably to the identification and implementation of a rationally determined, cost-effective and universal 'best practice'. Instead, a democratic approach seeks to make practice and outcomes visible to citizens, but takes that as the starting point for constructing knowledge and judgement through democratic processes. Information, including re-

search findings, does not tell us what to think or do, but is "fed into the process of public deliberation and decision making, in order to guarantee that legitimate parties to this process, i.e., citizens and stakeholders, receive due diligence in this process" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.39).

e) ***The spring of hope***. The final part of our case concerns *hope*. Both market and managerial approaches are, we believe, ultimately dispiriting and lead to disenchantment, offering the prospect of an excess of individualism and competition and an overriding concern with control and procedure. They stifle imagination and creativity, failing to provide the conditions for new thinking and practice that arises from the kind of encounters with difference that democracy at its best generates and thrives on. The parent consumer goes unchallenged in her or his preferences, and the values and ideas underlying them; the manager seeks to identify then apply the most effective method to achieve the predefined goal or target. In short, neither approach is conducive to critical thought, new understandings or collaborative deliberation as part of a community; neither offers "the pleasure of amazement and wonder" (Fortunati, 2006, p.37).

Democracy and experimentation, depending on how they are understood and practiced, are conducive to these important facets of human flourishing. For example, working with pedagogical documentation opens up to the co-construction of new understandings, new knowledges and new perspectives; it should be a dynamic and creative process. So democracy and experimentation offer hope for new directions and solutions, but they are also based on the hope that comes from faith or belief in what people are capable of and what they can contribute to collective action. In the words of John Dewey, democracy "is a way of personal life controlled not merely by faith in human nature in general but by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgement and action if proper conditions are furnished" (Dewey, 1939, p. 2). Or, in the more recent words of Roberto Unger, an essential doctrine of democracy is "faith in the constructive powers of ordinary men and women" (Unger, 2005a, p.67).

Hope lies in the possibility of renewal and invention. Education should have renewal as a main role and "schools can be thought of as places where new worlds are *allowed* to emerge, or to say this differently where the world is renewed." Yet it can so easily do the reverse, stifling and smothering by insisting on reproducing the past and fixating on predetermined (therefore past) outcomes. As Hannah Arendt observed, "(o)ur hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings…we destroy everything if we try to control the new" (1954, p.11).

5   What? Democracy and experimentation as educational values

Having examined the rationale for choosing democracy and experimentation as fundamental values in education, we consider in more detail what it might mean to have a democratic and experimental education, in pre-school and school. What, we ask, might these concepts themselves mean in practice. We should make it clear from the start that we are not arguing that democracy and experimentalism are the only two values that should count in and for education. Other values, in our opinion, are important and complementary, including responsibility, care, solidarity and social justice; others might come up with a different list. But democracy in a way precedes, since it enables deliberation and collective decision making about the critical question: what values are fundamental to education?

We should make one other point clear by way of introduction to our discussion of democracy and experimentation. Neither our advocacy of democracy as a fundamental value in education, nor our belief in democratic practice as central to education are new and original claims. We are simply reconnecting to a long, varied and cosmopolitan educational discourse.

At an individual level, John Dewey, described by Carr and Hartnett as "the most influential educational philosopher of the 20th century" (1996, p.54), considered democracy to be a central value, practice and role of school education, famously asserting that "democracy needs to be reborn in each generation, and education is its midwife." Then, as a wider example, there is the tradition of educational progressivism, largely a product of the late nineteenth century that came to hold sway, according to which country we are considering, during the 40 years between 1930 and 1970, though its roots go back much further to writers like Comenius and Rousseau, and its legacy remains a significant presence today (Darling and Norbenbo, 2003, p.289). Darling and Norbenbo suggest five recurring themes that characterise progressive approaches to schooling, – criticism of traditional education, the nature of knowledge, human nature, the development of the whole person – and democracy.

Within this progressive tradition, there are many examples of individual proponents who practiced democratic education, whether in schools or in work with marginalised or troubled young people. Some instances, drawn only from England and the USA, include A.S. Neill at Summerhill School, Howard Case's Epping Hill School, Tim McMullen and John Watts at Countesthorpe Community College, Lawrence Kohlberg's Just Community School movement in the USA, and Alex Bloom, the great, radical pioneer headteacher of St.George's-in-the-East School in one of the toughest areas of London's East End, who deliberately set out to create a "consciously democratic community

without regimentation, without corporal punishment, without competition" (Bloom, 1948, p.121; for a fuller discussion of Bloom's work and other examples, see Fielding and Moss, forthcoming 2010).

Our contemporary educational discourses, enthused by markets and management, not only ignore or marginalise democracy, but also sever all relationship with the past, except perhaps as something from which to escape, an embarrassment or hindrance to today's reformers. Similarly, we forget too readily the extensive record of earlier educational experimentation, and the pioneers who were prepared to think and practice something new because they believed it to be educationally and ethically important. This paper, in its pursuit of democracy and experimentation, owes much to the past and seeks to re-contact past to present, in the belief that such continuity, infused by a desire for renewal to take account of changing circumstance, provides good guidance for the future.

5.1 Democracy

Democracy is not a simple concept. It is a value expressed in diverse practices that are multi-dimensional and multi-levelled. An education inscribed with democracy as a value needs to address all dimensions and all levels. Each dimension and each level should be seen as mutually supportive and inter-dependent. Democratic government - federal, state or municipal - without democratic schools is a very partial idea of democracy and one with shaky foundations; while democratic schools will struggle to flourish and sustain themselves without the context of democratic government.

5.1.1 **Formal democracy: government and policy-making**

We can start with what people often think of when 'democracy' is mentioned, the formal institutions and procedures of representative democratic government at national/federal, regional/state and local levels: election of representatives to governing bodies operating at these different levels (e.g. national parliaments, local councils), the working of these bodies, and the various rules and norms associated with such democratic forms of government (e.g. electoral procedures, an independent media, the rule of law). This formal democracy has a key role to play in education, being an important forum for dialogue, deliberation and decision making about the sort of critical questions we discussed in the previous section, as well as for the formulation of policy and the allocation of resources. As such, its health is vital.

In reality, though, formal democracy is in a sickly state, struggling to respond to the contemporary challenges of a complex and threatened world and to retain the engagement of citizens (Morin, 1999; Bentley, 2005; Power Inquiry, 2006; Skidmore and Bound, 2008). Fewer people vote, elected representatives are distrusted and held in low esteem, whole sections of the community feel estranged from mainstream politics while many others feel cynical or disinterested, and unde-

mocratic political forces (from lobbyists to extremist groups) are on the rise. As Morin observes, we are in the midst

> of a draining and sclerosis of traditional politics, incapable of fathoming the new problems that appeal to it; in the midst of a politics that encompasses multi-faceted issues, handling them in compartmentalized, disjointed, and additive ways; and in the midst of a debased politics that lets itself be swallowed by experts, managers, technocrats, econocrats, and so on (Morin, 1999, p. 112).

As Morin suggests, the weakening of effective democratic government is apparent in the degree to which it has abrogated responsibility for decision making and evaluative judgements to markets and technocrats, transforming what is first and foremost an ethical and political endeavour, governing, into a technical and managerial exercise; education, like other important subjects of formal democratic politics, has been swallowed by what Morin terms the 'technobureaucracy'. Central to this process has been the growing importance attached to 'technical research' and 'evidence based' policy and practice, which arguably reflects 'the ideal of a rational consensus on the best form of life'. But, we would argue, formal democracy, especially in today's complex and diverse societies, requires a recognition of value plurality, multiple perspectives and alternative directions and the possibility that human beings can flourish in many ways of life: a democracy, in short, that supports a *modus vivendi*.

This approach to democracy requires not only collective choices about decisions that are of public significance, but a recognition that there is not one right answer, not one right way, and that "all knowledge, as well as all perception is an act of translation and perception, that is interpretation" (Morin, 1999, p.101). This is an agonistic idea of democracy, in which there are always differences of perspective, interest and power, which are made visible and, therefore, contestable in a continuous process, which

> should not be cause for despair because the desire to reach a final destination can only lead to the elimination of the political and the destruction of democracy. In a democratic polity, conflicts and confrontations, far from being a sign of imperfection, indicate that democracy is alive and inhabited by pluralism (Mouffe, 2000, p.34).

Morin also sees democracy in a similar light, where consensus is limited to respect for democratic institutions and procedures, and dissensus and conflict are positively valued:

> Democracy implies and enhances diversity among interests and social groups as well as diversity between ideas, which means it should not impose majority dictatorship, but rather acknowledge the right to existence and expression of dissenting minorities and allow the expression of heretical and deviant ideas (Morin, 1999, p.90).

This implies a democracy of governance, at whatever level, that attaches as much importance to process as to outcome (assuming the two can be separated), that welcomes and makes visible differences of view and meaning, that acknowledges the contestability and provisionality of all decisions, and that does not expect to shift responsibility for such decisions to supposedly objective and neutral experts and evidence. Instead of reducing educational debate through an exclusive attention to one perspective, which purports to tell the truth, agonistic democracy would make visible (or transparent) conflicting perspectives, for example different paradigmatic and theoretical positions. The role of social research would be to 'produce input to dialogue and praxis in social affairs, rather than to generate ultimate, unequivocally verified "knowledge"', a theme we return to in the next section.

5.1.2 **Informal democracy: democracy as a way of being and everyday democracy**

But there are also other dimensions of democracy as a value, also with their own practices. Democracy can be understood as a mode of being in the world. In the words of John Dewey, democracy is "primarily a mode of associated living embedded in the culture and social relationships of everyday life"; it is "a personal way of individual life: … it signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life" (Dewey, 1939, p.2). This is democracy understood as an approach to living and relating, an ethos and a way of acting, that can and should pervade all aspects of everyday life, not least in the school: "a way of being, of thinking of oneself in relation to others and the world….a fundamental educational value and form of educational activity" (Rinaldi, 2006, p.156). Danish researcher Ole Langsted, writing of an early example of listening to young children about their experiences of early childhood education, also makes the point clearly, when he argues that what should precede structures and procedures for listening is the desire to listen: "more important [than these structures and procedures] is the cultural climate which shapes the ideas that the adults in a particular society hold about children. The wish to listen to and involve children originates in this cultural climate" (Langsted, 1994, p.41-42).

Democracy as a way of being and acting is closely related to the idea of what Tom Bentley terms 'everyday democracy', the enactment of democratic values in the relationships and places in which children and adults spend most of their time. Modern democracies, argue Skidmore and Bound, must be such everyday democracies, "rooted in a culture in which democratic values and practices

shape not just the formal sphere of politics but the informal sphere of everyday life" (2008, p.7). This culture calls for dialogue and listening, respect for diversity and other perspectives, a readiness to contest and to negotiate, a recognition of one's own partial knowledge and particular perspective; these are qualities, as manifested by educators, that we will explore further in the next section.

Such everyday democracy has its place in formal democratic institutions, shaping the way politicians, administrators and others conduct themselves and their business. But it is particularly important at more local, institutional levels. When Skidmore and Bound talk about everyday democracy in 'the informal spheres of everyday life', they include families, communities, workplaces – and schools[7]; and when we speak about democracy in the pre-school and school, we are thinking more of 'everyday democracy' than the procedures and institutions of formal democracy. Both types of democracy – the formal and the everyday - are about democracy, but everyday democracy is about the conduct of democracy in everyday life in everyday institutions.

'Everyday democracy' is seen as an antidote to the atomisation of society and the erosion of concern for the common good apparent in hyper-individualistic neo-liberal societies. Tom Bentley has argued for 'everyday democracy' as an urgent response to the crisis in traditional democratic politics, in which 'our preoccupation with making *individual* choices is undermining our ability to make *collective* choices' (2005, p.19, emphasis added). Similarly, Skidmore and Bound emphasise how 'everyday democracy' provides one response to the artificial separation of the collective and the individual: "any workable approach to democracy today needs to reckon with, and be able to reconcile, our need for both a personal and a collective sense of agency" (2008, p.24). The same point is taken up by three *pedagogistas*[8] from Reggio Emilia, who emphasise the importance of going beyond 'participation' in school at a purely *individual* level to 'participation' involving a communal level, what we might term participation as everyday democracy:

> If participation is to assume a role in the active and democratic construction of the educational project of a school and a community, this first [individual] level is not enough. 'To participate' is a verb that can be conjugated in both the singular and the plural. Each person can participate as an individual subject who singly makes his or her contribution and singly

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[7] Skidmore and Bound (2008) have developed an 'Everyday Democracy Index', consisting of 21 indicators grouped into six dimensions, including 'electoral and procedural democracy', 'family democracy' and 'democratic public services'. Using a Danish primary school as an example, they talk about "democracy through education and education through democracy" (p.39)

[8] *Pedagogistas*, found in many Italian communities, are experienced educators, each working with a small number of municipal schools to help develop understanding of learning processes and pedagogical work through, for example, pedagogical documentation.

takes in the information and contributions provided by the others...Individual participation is, and will always be, an aspect of everyone's participation. But participation takes on further meaning if the school presents itself as a community – in relation to the wider community represented by the town – and with a broader strategy...[the value and practice of participation means] actively engaging all the children, teachers and parents in a community dimension that involves reading and interpreting change together (Cagliari, Barozzi and Giudici, 2004, p.29).

Such 'everyday institutions' in which the principles of everyday democracy can and should apply include, as we have indicated, both pre-schools and schools. Everyday democracy in these everyday institutions is partly, as we have argued, a case of how we live with and relate to each other – how we treat, respect and listen to each other. But it is also about the conduct of certain activities, certain tasks that involve choices, power and responsibility, which Bentley describes as

the practice of self-government through the choices, commitments and connections of daily life. Everyday democracy means extending democratic power and responsibility simultaneously to the settings of everyday life...*It means that people can actively create the world in which they live* (2005, pp.20-21; emphasis added).

Let us take some examples of this process of active creation of the world through everyday democracy. It can involve the *formal governance* of pre-schools and schools, for example decisions about goals and practices, personnel and resources, environments and relationships with the wider community. This may involve formal structures and procedures, such as elected governing bodies or school councils or open school meetings or other forums, deliberating on a regular basis and with set terms of reference. But everyday democracy can also involve more ad hoc and varied means to enable participation in *decision-making*, ranging from small issues in daily life to larger matters such as designing the environment (see, for example, Clark, 2010) and deciding about project work (see, for example, Vecchi, 2010). Both formal governance and less formal decision-making should involve participation by a wide range of adults, including parents, educators and other citizens in the local community, but also by children.

An example of involving very young children in decisions about their daily life comes from the *Demokratie Leben* project, conducted in day nurseries in a town in eastern Germany, working with very young children, under 3 years of age. At the heart of this project was respecting the autonomy of one and two-year-old children in everyday relationships and activities, for example feeding, changing nappies and planning activities for the day. This may involve developing negotiating skills:

> The teacher negotiates with the children what they should do in the afternoon. This shows that negotiating means more than just voting. When the vote decides, the majority is always content but in a worst case scenario almost half the group is unhappy or – like in this example – only two children. But two discontented children are already two too many. The goals of negotiation processes are that nobody is left behind or sidelined...Negotiation until a consensus is reached is, naturally, a perfected art. But it is always worth trying (Priebe, quoted in George, 2009, p.14).

There is, of course, an important relationship to be explored and defined between formal democratic government of the nation, region or municipality and the formal democratic government of preschools and schools. Each level of government, from nation to school, has responsibilities for democratically determining certain norms that apply to the levels below or, in the case of the school, to all members of the school community. National (or occasionally, state/regional) government, for example, will determine certain common entitlements, structures, goals and values, though in a way that leaves some scope for interpretation at local or institutional levels and leaves some room for these lower levels to democratically determine their own additional norms. Strong everyday democracy and everyday institutions calls for strong decentralisation with much local decision-making: but it does not mean doing without common and democratically-determined national norms.

Evaluation can be democratic when participatory forms are used, such as pedagogical documentation, which for Malaguzzi "meant the possibility to discuss and dialogue 'discussing everything with everyone'", but based on "being able to discuss real, concrete things – not just theories or words, about which it is possible to reach easy and naïve agreement" (Hoyuelos, 2004, p.7). We can speak, too, about democratic *learning*, based on a pedagogy that values listening, dialogue and diversity and understood as co-construction of meaning whose outcome is unpredictable. Carlina Rinaldi epitomises democratic learning when she describes project work as evoking

> a journey that involves uncertainty and chance that always arises in relationships with others. Project work grows in many directions, with no predefined progression, no outcomes decided before the journey begins. It means being sensitive to the unpredictable results of children's investigation and research (Rinaldi, 2005b, p. 19).

When Bonacci, the Mayor of Reggio Emilia in the 1960s, says that Reggio's experiment in early childhood education was prompted by their experience of fascism that taught them "that people who conformed and obeyed were dangerous, and that in building a new society it was impera-

tive…to nurture and maintain a vision of children who can think and act for themselves" (Dahlberg, 2000, p.177), he too is envisioning a democratic education.

Everyday democracy can also entail creating opportunities for *contesting dominant discourses*, confronting what Foucault terms regimes of truth, which seek to shape our subjectivities and practices through their universal truth claims and their relationship with power. This political activity seeks to make core assumptions and values visible and contestable. Yeatman (1994) refers to it as 'postmodern politics' and offers some examples: a *politics of epistemology*, contesting modernity's idea of knowledge[9]; a *politics of representation*, about whose perspectives have legitimacy; and a *politics of difference*, which contests those groups claiming a privileged position of objectivity on a contested subject. But we could extend the areas opened up to politics, that are repoliticised as legitimate subjects for inclusive political dialogue and contestation: the *politics of childhood*, about the image of the child, the good life and what we want for our children; the *politics of education*, about what education can and should be; and the *politics of gender*, in the nursery and the home. Pedagogical documentation can provide one means of contesting dominant discourses, through making this one of the tasks of interpreting practice made visible.

It is through contesting dominant discourses that a fifth democratic activity can emerge: *opening up for change*, through developing a critical approach to what exists, envisioning utopias and using them to provoke utopian action. For as Foucault (1988) observes, there is a close connection between contesting dominant discourses, thinking differently and change: "As soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible." This also opens for our second theme, experimentation, which can be understood as exploring the possibility of transformation.

There is, as we have already noted, a tradition of democratic education in compulsory schooling Yet democracy as a value and practice is equally relevant in the pre-school. Democracy and democratic citizens are not just for a later age, they are not something we prepare children to practice and become as they grow older: they are something young children can and should live here and now. The case is put by the author of the *Demokratie Leben* project, which took place in day nurseries in a German town:

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[9] Modernity's idea of knowledge "aims at formulating laws in the light of observed regularities and with a view to foreseeing future behaviour of phenomena" (Santos, 1995, p.14); it adopts values such as objectivity, order, stability and universality. A postmodern idea of knowledge would emphasise knowledge as always partial, perspectival and provisional, "local knowledge created and disseminated through argumentative discourse" (ibid., p.37).

Democracy and day nursery are two terms that are not immediately associated with each other. But where and when does democracy start? In pre-school? In day care? In school? Or only when people are old enough to vote? Knowledge and insights gained from the evaluation of the project 'Living democracy in day care centres' show that the basis for a democratic everyday culture can indeed already be formed in the day nursery (Priebe, quoted in George, 2009, p.14).

But there are other examples to draw on, of practicing democracy in pre-schools, as well as of democracy as formal policy. In a number of countries, for instance, democracy is a visible value in national pre-school policy: "official policy documents and curriculum guidelines in the Nordic countries acknowledge a central expectation that pre-schools and schools will exemplify democratic principles and that children will be active participants in these democratic environments" (Wagner, 2006, p.292). The Swedish pre-school curriculum, as one example, states that 'Democracy forms the foundation of the pre-school…all pre-school activity should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values'.

All forms of democracy at all levels are important and welcome; it is certainly not a case of 'either/or' but of 'and…and…and'. Traditional or formal democratic politics and institutions must be supported and revived; there is no substitute for elected parliaments and local assemblies – communes, municipalities, councils - where a wide range of different interests and ideas, parties and perspectives can be represented, where such differences can be argued and negotiated, where political agreements can be hammered out, and where governments can be held to account and the wings of power can be clipped. But other dimensions of democracy need to be stimulated, for example through developing new places and new subjects for the practice of everyday democratic living and politics – including, early childhood institutions and schools and issues that are central to the everyday lives of the children and adults who participate in these institutions.

For ultimately, the different levels and forms of democracy are inter-related and interdependent. A healthy democracy needs to be healthy in all its parts, including a democratic education where children and young people live democracy and can develop their democratic capacities:

Since, in a democracy, decision-making is no longer the preserve of an aristocratic elite, schools must become embryonic societies providing all pupils with opportunities to develop the social attitudes, skills and dispositions that allow them to formulate and achieve their collective ends by confronting shared problems and common concerns. For Dewey, it is primarily by promoting the growth of social intelligence through co-operative problem-solving

activities that schools can support and promote the evolution of a more democratic social or-der (Carr and Hartnett, 1996, p.63).

5.2 Experimentation

5.2.1 **As a value**

Like democracy, experimentation is both value and practice and the two are inter-dependent; the value without the practice counts for little. Experimentation as a value is about bringing something new to life, whether that something is a thought, knowledge, a project, a service or a tangible prod-uct. It expresses a willingness, a desire in fact, to invent, to think differently, to imagine and try out different ways of doing things. It is driven by the desire to go beyond what already exists, to ven-ture into the not yet known, and not to be bound by the given, the familiar, the predetermined, the norm: "experimentation is always that which is in the process of coming about - the new, remarka-ble, and interesting that replace the appearance of truth and are more demanding than it is" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p.111). Experimentation is open-ended (avoiding closure), open-minded (welcoming the unexpected) and open-hearted (valuing difference).

Without experimentation, we are locked into an endless round of reproducing, in which the same prescribed means pursue the same known ends, in a repetitive, predictable and sterile process. Experimentation has outcomes, but welcomes those that are unexpected and surprising, that pro-duce new understandings and meanings; it relishes emotions of wonder, amazement and excitement. At the same time, experimentation treats the idea of predetermined outcomes with suspicion, for their capacity to suppress or marginalise what is innovative and original: such out-comes express "our will to truth, which can be thought of in this first instance as a will to certain outcomes, sets communication along present railway tracks as pointed out by Wittgenstein, pre-venting alternative ways of relating to the world that are open-ended and experimental" (Roy, 2004, p.302)[10].

The practice of experimentation is inscribed not only with the value of experimentation, but also with particular perspectives on epistemology and learning. It has, therefore, huge implications for education and the school. Osberg and Biesta have outlined these perspectives in two articles which argue the case for 'updating the epistemology of schooling', taking as their starting point that

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[10] We should clarify our position on outcomes. A democratic society that takes responsibility for the education of its children, including financing this education, may include predetermined outcomes as part of the framework of norms it applies to all pre-schools and schools. The is-sues, however, are how these predetermined outcomes are arrived at (how democratic is the process?), whether they are treated as provisional and contestable, and whether un-predetermined outcomes are recognised and valued.

current epistemological trends bring into question the logic guiding the whole area of modern schooling…The current need to update the epistemology of schooling originates from a general trend in epistemology which moves from a static, passive or representational view of knowledge towards a more active and adaptive one. With the former knowledge is held to be an accurate representation of a pre-existing reality. With the latter it is held that knowledge is caught up with the activity and situations in which it is produced (Biesta and Osberg, 2007, pp.15-16).

The representational epistemology that underpins modern schooling, and which has defined the task of modern schools as getting the child to understand a pre-existing world, needs replacing by an 'emergenist' epistemology, defined

as the creation of new properties…[C]ontemporary understandings of emergence have retained the idea that emergence introduces properties that are novel and sometimes even inconceivable or unimaginable…Strong emergence therefore presents a direct challenge to determinism (the idea that given one set of circumstances there is only one logical outcome)…[If] we think of knowledge (or knowing) not as *determined* by our engagement with the present, but as *emerging* from our engagement with the present…each knowledge event – which is to say each taking place of knowledge (knowing) – is necessarily *also radically new* (Osberg and Biesta, 2007, pp.3, 34, 40)

Put another way, "in an emergent universe we cannot rely on the rules of the past to dictate what we should do in the future". This leads Biesta and Osberg to propose (following Ulmer, 1985) a 'pedagogy of invention', which they describe as emerging from "a complexity inspired epistemology" in which "knowledge does not bring us closer to what is *already* present but, rather, moves us into a *new* reality which is incalculable from what came before…knowledge is not conservative but *radically inventionalistic*" (ibid., p.46).

They also propose an innovatory image of the school, which discards the common image of schools as "places where the rules of the past are taught in order to take care of the future...replicating the past and holding the world still" (ibid., p.47). Instead of teaching children about a pre-given world, Biesta and Osberg argue they must be places

where meanings can be responsibly negotiated and hence where the new is allowed to appear….We believe that if we rethink the purposes of schooling using insights from complexity and deconstruction, which suggest an emergentist relationship between the world and our

knowledge of it, then we must think of schools as not as (sic) places where the meaning of a present world (which is also a world that has always already passed) are replicated and hence preserved. Instead schools can be thought of as places where new worlds are *allowed* to emerge, or to say this differently where the world is renewed (ibid., p.49).

An education adopting a 'pedagogy of invention' and a 'complexity inspired epistemology' and a school that views itself as a place for renewal are, we would argue, both deeply inscribed with the value of experimentation. They would also be well equipped to respond to the challenges facing our species today, which we outlined in the first section. Indeed, taking up the theme of an education for survival, Biesta and Osberg suggest that "one function of schooling is to teach the young how to take care of the world...because we care about and wish to take responsibility for the future, the world that will emerge" (ibid., p.47).

5.2.2 **As practice**

There are, we would further argue, important examples of pedagogical practice inscribed with the value of experimentation, emphasising the invention or creation of new knowledge. John Dewey's approach to pedagogy has been described by a recent biographer as 'essentially experimental', expressed in his establishment of a school for testing out ideas, the 'Laboratory School' (Pring, 2007, p.16). Biesta and Osberg also point to the example of Dewey, whose pedagogical approach is "strongly rooted in the idea that knowledge is not a reflection of the static world but emerges as we engage with or 'experience' reality" and whose goal was to make schools "into places where children could learn directly by experiment and discovery'" (Biesta and Osberg, 2007, pp.25-26).

In another article, Biesta explores further the pedagogical ideas of Dewey and in particular his view of the centrality of experimentation:

> We basically acquire our habits through processes of trial and error – or, in more theoretical languages, through experimentation. In a very fundamental sense, experimentation is the only way in which we can learn anything at all: we learn because we do and subsequently undergo the consequences of doing. Yet for Dewey, there is a crucial difference between blind trial and error – experimentation without deliberation and direction – and what he calls intelligent action. The difference between the two has to do with the intervention of thinking or reflection (Biesta, 2007, p.14)

Dewey contrasted this 'transactional theory of knowing' with what he called the 'spectator theory of knowledge': "an immaterial mind looking at the material world and registering what goes on it" (ibid., p.13). Dewey argued, Biesta adds, that we should be experimental not only with respect to

means but also with respect to ends and the interpretation of the problems we address. Viewed in this way, experimentation also includes creating new understandings and imagining innovative practices, similar perhaps to what Halpin describes as "utopian thought experiments", which start from the question "(h)ow would social reality look if we configured it in radically different and improved terms and from different positions than is normally adopted" (Halpin, 2003, pp.53-54).

More recently, experimentation can be seen as an important influence on the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia, in particular in what they term a 'pedagogy of listening', which (as we saw in the preceding section) requires active encouragement to children to experiment with theories and meaning making as part of a 'community of inquirers':

> to construct a community of inquirers with an experimental spirit requires listening and a radical dialogue. In 'real' listening children become partners in a process of experimentation and research by inventing problems and by listening to and negotiating what other children, as well as the teacher, are saying and doing. In this process the co-constructing pedagogue has to open her/him self to the unexpected and experiment together with the children – in the here and now event. S/he challenges the children by augmenting connections through enlarging the number of concepts, hypotheses and theories, as well as through new material and through challenging children's more technical work. Besides getting a responsible relation to other children by listening, they also are negotiating in between each other, enlarging the choices that can be made, instead of bringing choice down to universal trivializations (Dahlberg and Bloch, 2006, p.114).

As this excerpt emphasises, there is a strong connection in this pedagogical approach between dialogue and listening, challenging and negotiation, openness and innovation – in short, between democracy and experimentation.

This way of working, inscribed with experimentation as a value, is underpinned by a strong desire to be open to new meanings and knowledges, and a corresponding reluctance to be tied by working to predetermined outcomes: "the potential of the child is stunted when the endpoint of their learning is formulated in advance" (Rinaldi, 1993, p.104). 'Project work' ('*progettazione'),* which plays a central role in Reggio's schools, has a strongly experimental character:

> [It] evokes the idea of a dynamic process, a journey that involves the uncertainty and chance that always arises in relationships with others. Project work grows in many directions, with no predefined progression, no outcomes decided before the journey begins. It means being sensitive to the unpredictable results of children's investigation and research. The course of

a project can thus be short, medium or long, continuous or discontinuous, and is always open to modifications and changes of direction (Rinaldi, 2005b, p. 19).

Also important in this pedagogy is the theory of the hundred languages of children - by which, as already noted (see footnote 5), we mean the many communicative possibilities with which our species is genetically equipped – with particular attention given to 'poetic' or 'aesthetic languages'. The importance of these languages is to enable children and adults to see things in new ways, to escape pre-defined categories and pre-existing formulas, and to develop new connections from which new knowledge can emerge – in short, multilingualism of this kind opens up for experimentation and original thinking. Vea Vecchi emphasises the need for education and schools to create space for such thinking:

> It is important to society that schools and we as teachers are clearly aware how much space we leave children for original thinking, without rushing to restrict it with predetermined schemes that define what is *correct* according to a school culture. How much do we support children to have ideas different from those of other people and how do we accustom them to arguing and discussing their ideas with their classmates? I am quite convinced that greater attention to processes, rather than only the final product, would help us to feel greater respect for the independent thinking and strategies of children and teenagers (Vecchi, 2010, p.138).

A final example of experimentation as a value in practice in education comes from a recent book by Liselott Marriet Olsson, *Movement and Experimentation in Young Children's Learning*. Starting from the premise that young children and learning are today often tamed, predicted, supervised, controlled and evaluated according to predetermined standards, the book argues that the challenge to practice and research is to find ways of regaining movement and experimentation in learning. Inspired by the work of French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari, Olsson demonstrates the possibilities for experimentation in the classroom through documenting and analysis of extensive experience in Swedish preschools:

> In many of the preschools in the city of Stockholm and its suburbs and at the Stockholm Institute of Education, 'every day magical moments' take place. Children, preschool teachers, teacher students, teacher educators and researchers come together and are literally caught up in the desire to experiment with subjectivity and learning. In these practices experimentations and intense, unpredictable events are taking place, concerning the idea of what a child is, what a teacher should do, the purpose of a preschool and its organisation, contents and forms. (Olsson, 2009, p.11)

The examples we have offered of experimentation in practice relate mainly to learning in the school: experimentation as a central process in teaching and learning. But experimentation can take many other forms. It may involve exploring the potential of working with particular paradigms or theorists; in early childhood education, for example, there is an increasing body of experimentation involving post-structural theorists such as Deleuze, Guattari, Bakhtin and Foucault (see, for example, Mac Naughton, 2005; Edmiston, 2007; Lenz Taguchi, 2009; Olsson, 2009). It may involve experimenting with new ways of organising schools, for example with different age groups, different sizes, different multi-professional teams (for a further discussion, see Fielding and Moss, forthcoming). Or it may involve generating new activities, stimulated by inclusion of and engagement with citizens in the local community, parents or otherwise. Working in this way, schools can become 'extended experimental schools', from which new projects emerge out of a sense of responsibility and a desire to try something new. Experimentation here may involve further learning, for example with adults, but also with many other purposes in mind: support families, building solidarities, sustaining culture, generating the local economy, strengthening democracy etc. (for an example of a pre-school that has created an experimental 'project identity', with many projects in response to engagement with its local community, see Broadhead, Meleady and Delgado, 2008).

Like democracy, therefore, experimentation can have its more formal side, involving instituting new projects in a service or community. But it also represents a way of living and relating, expressed for example in educational relationships within the school and a resistance to reproducing the predetermined. It can be a new take on an old subject, bringing to bear new perspectives and methods; or responding to a new subject, one that has emerged because of changing conditions or new understandings.

5.3   Democracy and experimentation

Democracy and experimentation are not inseparable; they can occur in isolation, connected to other values and practices, not to each other. Experimentation can be associated with a certain scientific method, where parameters and conditions are controlled and outcomes are expected.
It has an important role in market systems "that allow for experimentation by many economic decision-makers who can expect rich rewards for success" (Hutton and Schneider, 2008, p.8). Markets, it is argued, are dynamic in seeking out and applying new technologies and new products, to increase efficiency and to respond to consumer demand. Here experimentation brings private gains accruing to individual entrepreneurs or corporations.

In choosing to link democracy and experimentation in the education system, we are inspired by Roberto Unger's advocacy of 'democratic experimentalism':

> The provision of public services must be an innovative collective practice, moving forward the qualitative provision of the services themselves. That can no longer happen in our current understanding of efficiency and production by the mechanical transmission of innovation from the top. It can only happen through the organisation of a collective experimental practice from below…Democracy is not just one more terrain for the institutional innovation that I advocate. It is the most important terrain (Unger, 2005a, pp.179, 182).

For Unger, experimentation is an essential element of what he terms 'high energy democracy', which should include "vastly expanded opportunities to try out, in particular parts of the country or sectors of the economy, different ways of doing things" (ibid., p.78). But democracy is also, in our view, an essential element in educational innovation, viewing education (as we do) as a public good and responsibility: it enables public deliberation from which new ideas for experimentation can be generated and prioritised, raises understanding of experimentation in theory and practice, creates "innovation-friendly cooperative practices" (ibid., p.52), aids transparency, and shares equitably the benefits of innovation. Where experimentation is a collective practice, the immaterial products to which it gives rise – "ideas, images, knowledge, communication, cooperation, and affective relations…social life itself" – accrue to the public benefit, rather than being siphoned off as private profit.

In his study of innovative schools serving disadvantaged communities, Leadbeater draws a somewhat similar connection, in this case between innovation and collaboration ('collaboration' might be considered a quality needed for democracy, but not as synonymous):

> Lasting public innovations are invariably deeply collaborative undertakings, which succeed only with the mobilisation and collaboration of many different participants. In the case of changes to education these players involve at least pupils and parents, teachers and governments, politicians and policy makers, both national and local, as well as related public agencies, employers and the community around a school. Public innovation is more like mobilising a social movement…around which a variety of competing and collaborating companies can work. That process of open, collaborative innovation, is impossible unless the people involved share common goals and frames of reference (Leadbeater, 2008, p.14).

We can also link democracy with experimentalism at the level of the learning individual or group. For if learning is a process of allowing new thinking and knowledge to emerge, then this requires democratic relationships. It means combining a democratic pedagogy of listening with an experimental pedagogy of innovation:

> The classroom must become a place where meanings can be responsibly negotiated and hence where the new is allowed to appear...To do this we must make sure within schools children have the opportunity not only to engage deeply and responsibly with curricular content, but also have the opportunity to respond to it, to make choices, take a position and be heard (Osberg and Biesta, 2007, p.49).

So without denying an important role for experimentation in private enterprise and business, nor excluding a role for individual experimentation in education, we argue for building and maintaining a strong relationship between democracy *and* experimentation in the education system.

5.4 In conclusion

We have argued for democracy and experimentation as two fundamental values for preschool and school education and for their inter-connectedness and discussed the meaning we give to them. We have given examples, from preschool and school, of how these values can find expression in various practices, from national policy to learning in the classroom. However, these are only examples, not a comprehensive inventory. For as fundamental values, democracy and experimentation do not constitute a shopping list but are an ethos; they should permeate education and schooling, influencing all aspects of educational thought, policy and practice. Moreover, these values should be the subject of continuing interrogation of meaning and evaluation of application to avoid them becoming empty concepts surviving mainly as clichés adorning corporate mission statements.

Nor should we assume that democracy and experimentation will flourish left to their own devices. They are demanding and can atrophy, unless constant attention is paid to conditions that will enable, promote and sustain them. Too often, past attempts at innovative and democratic education have withered in a few years because insufficient attention has been paid to the provision of support for complex and difficult projects; Reggio Emilia's 'local cultural project of childhood', now more than 40-years-old, is a rare exception, in part due to providing conditions to support sustainability. Whereas huge amounts of resources have, in recent years, been poured in to developing educational markets and management systems, insignificant sums have gone to exploring alternatives and encouraging diversity, one consequence, we would argue, of democracy and experimentation not being valued. We turn now, therefore, to consider under what conditions a democratic and experimental education might be nurtured, brought on and made to work well.

6   How? Conditions for democratic and experimental education

In the first two sections of this paper we have made out the case for democracy and experimentation as central values for, and approaches to, education in the 21st century. We have argued that, among other necessary and possible choices, *democracy* is fundamental to education: as a foundation for curricular content (as shown by the example of the Swedish pre-school curriculum), and as a precondition for educational institutions in a democratic, civil society, where public and civil affairs – the *res publica* that go beyond individualist consumerism and managerial technocracy – have to be addressed in all public institutions.

We have argued for *experimentation* to be the counterpart of democratic education, as practices and encounters of such an education are necessarily transient, and its outcomes always preliminary. Democratic education, as we understand it in the context of this paper, is about constant dialogue (i.e. multilogue) between citizens (children, adults, professionals and laypersons), and an ethic of encounter in which all participants *learn*, rather than one-way streets of knowledge transmission from adults to children, from teachers to pupils. Educational institutions – schools and preschools – thus should be understood as civil forums for interaction and engagement at eye-level, aiming at building equal relationships between individuals and groups.

Such an institution, however, cannot exist on its own; it can neither be imagined nor realised in isolation from the wider context of a civil society. *Democracy* and *experimentation* are demanding concepts that require careful attention to creating favourable conditions, if they are to flourish. And even if those conditions can be provided and maintained, as we believe they can, it is most likely, as with any other practice with and between humans, that they will never work perfectly. As a matter of fact, democracy and experimentation in education have to be constantly re-newed, re-envisaged and re-invented by all participants.

One of the most important conditions, we will argue, lies with those who work professionally in educational institutions, preschools and schools: a professional educator with the ability and desire to work with democracy and experimentation. As with schools and preschools that embrace democracy and experimentation, this educator is part of, and actively contributing to, a civil society that in itself can provide a range of conditions that enable democracy and experimentation. But before turning to consider the educator at some length, we first touch on some of the other conditions for a democratic and experimental education.

6.1   A more equal society for democracy and experimentation

Democratic experimentalism is more likely to flourish in a society with a civic ethos, reflected in its institutions, that actively promotes justice and equality throughout society. Societies vary considerably in how equal they are, and as the work of Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett clearly shows, "more equal societies almost always do better" on a wide range of indicators of social well-being: inequality, they conclude, "seems to make countries socially dysfunctional across a wide range of outcomes" (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, p.174). More equal societies do not just provide a better life for their citizens. They are often more democratic: Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Belgium are in the top six EU member states on Skidmore and Bound's everyday democracy index, and also have some of the lowest levels of income inequality. More equal societies also have other collective strengths: "they are more socially cohesive and have higher levels of trust which foster public-spiritedness" (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, p.227).

Tony Judt, a leading historian of post-war Europe, sums up the crucial importance of a just and equal society, as a basis for all other hopes and aspirations:

> Of all the competing and only partially reconcilable ends we might seek, the reduction of inequality must come first. Under conditions of endemic inequality, all other desirable goals become hard to achieve...But inequality is not just a technical problem (of access to services). It illustrates and exacerbates the loss of social cohesion...If we remain grotesquely unequal, we shall lose all sense of fraternity: and fraternity, for all its fatuity as a political objective, turns out to be the necessary condition of politics itself. The inculcation of a sense of common purpose and mutual dependence has long been regarded as the linchpin of any community. Inequality is not just morally troubling; it is inefficient. (Judt, 2010, p.3)

6.2   A state actively promoting democracy and experimentation

A public education inscribed with the values of democracy and experimentation is more likely, we would argue, where the state (at all levels) acknowledges the importance of these values in education and commits itself to their active promotion and support. For example, as we have already noted, democracy is a fundamental value of the Swedish preschool and school systems, spelt out as such at the start of the curricula for preschools and schools (Swedish Ministry of Education, 1998). Nor is this central role for democracy only to be found in Sweden. The Nordic concept of a good childhood rests, Judith Wagner argues, on a number of 'bedrock ideals' including democracy, and this is expressed in policy:

> The Nordic notion of democracy as an essential feature of the good childhood requires that children experience democracy directly as an integral and consistent aspect of their daily lives at home, in school, and in their communities. Official policy documents and curriculum guidelines in the Nordic countries acknowledge a central expectation that preschools and schools will exemplify democratic principles and that children will be active participants in these democratic environments (Wagner, 2006, p. 292)

Nor is democracy as a central and explicit value of education confined to these countries. Another example, but by no means the only other, is, as we have seen, the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia.

Experimentation can also be an actively pursued public goal. We have already referred to Roberto Unger's advocacy of 'democratic experimentalism', and he suggests two specific roles for government in this context, dissemination and provision:

> The state monitors and helps propagate the most successful practices, accelerating the process of experimental winnowing out of what does not work....(T)he state provides directly only those services which are too innovative, too difficult or too unrewarded by the market to be provided directly...The provision of public services must be an innovative collective practice (Unger, 2005b, p.179).

Another Brazilian social thinker, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, envisages a similar experimental role for the state:

> Rather than impose one form of sociability, the state must be made to create the conditions for social experimentation, that is, the conditions necessary so that alternative sociabilities may be credibly experimented with in each of the six structural spaces [household, work, market, community, citizenship, world]. This implies a profound transformation of the welfare state. In the paradigmatic transition, the welfare state is the state form that guarantees social experimentation (Santos, 1995, p.483).

Turning to a more specific case, we can see the early childhood education in the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia as an example of government-promoted experimentation, the local authority (municipality) in this case being the government source of support for experimentation in pedagogical work. A second example, this time at the level of national government, was the Centres of Innovation action research programme, launched in 2002 by the New Zealand government as part of the quality goal of the strategic plan. The aim was to challenge teachers' practice and foster teachers'

research development. Five rounds of this programme, each round focused on innovation in speci-fied areas, have been organised involving 20 practitioner teams, each from a different early childhood service, working with research associates to "promote a deeper exploration of innovative teaching and learning processes" (www.minedu.govt.nz)[11].

Funded by the New Zealand Department of Education, the Centres of Innovation initiative arguably has been the most progressive approach to develop, support, disseminate and theorise locally appropriate educational practices (Ministry of Education, 2007; Urban, 2007).

An important feature of a state actively promoting democracy and experimentation would be the state's acknowledgement and welcoming of different perspectives and its capacity to work with them. One sign of this would be recognition – for example, in policy documents and initiatives - of different paradigmatic and theoretical perspectives, rather than, as is usually the case today, rely-ing on one dominant perspective, invariably positivistic and modernist. Today you can read the experiences of academic and early years educators who are 'doing' not only Deleuze and Guattari in everyday early childhood education, but Foucault, Derrida, Bakhtin and others (cf. Dahberg and Moss, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2005; Edmiston, 2008; Lenz Taguchi, 2009) – but rarely will you see reference made to such work in international or national research reviews, policy papers or initia-tives.

But there are also differences of perspective that arise from different backgrounds and expe-riences, and that recognise the social, ethnic and cultural diversity of modern societies. Such diversity can be reflected at central level (one example from the educational field being the Irish *Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers* (Office of the Minister for Children, 2006)) and supported by municipalities engaging in local dialogue with children, families and practitioners – as shown by Bertelsmann Foundation in the project "Kind&Ko" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008).

6.3 An infrastructure for democracy and experimentation

Structures, systems and resources need to be put in place, without which democratic experimen-talism cannot flourish. The local authority (municipality) can play a major role in creating this infrastructure. We can draw on a number of positive examples, including the German institution of *Fachberatung* (pedagogical counselling), the *centre for pedagogical coordination* in the Belgian city of Ghent (UNESCO, 2010), and the early childhood education services in a number of northern Italian cities, such as Bologna, Pistoia, San Miniato and Reggio Emilia.

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[11] However, in May 2009, the newly elected right wing New Zealand government announced the termination of the programme as a cost cutting measure, with the two current rounds of research on innovative pedagogy having to end within five weeks.

An important part of the infrastructure in these Italian experiences is the role of the *pedagogistas* or pedagogical counsellor. Carlina Rinaldi describes the crucial role played by the local authority team of *pedagogistas* in Reggio Emilia, within schools, between schools, and between schools and their communities and the city itself; they listen, they dialogue, they make links, and they connect theory with practice, the work and organisation of the school with the project of the municipality. They are, Rinaldi says, "responsible for the relationship between the inside and the outside world" (2006, p.167), making connections, crossing borders, improving flows, offering new perspectives. By doing so, they can foster participation in the local educational project and cultivate a shared educational identity.

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Annalia Galardini, the head of early childhood education in Pistoia, another Italian city which has created its own local educational project, describes the team of *pedagogistas* in that local authority as "a decisive factor in the quality of local networks of services" and develops Rinaldi's discussion of the *pedagogista* role:

> (The *pedagogista's* role) is to nurture and improve the quality of educational policies for children…One of the *pedagogista's* strategic functions has been to guarantee a link between the various services in order to develop a unified educational identity and a shared perception of children's needs. This coordination function emphasises dialogue and collaboration between educators, schools and families…(The role) has meant giving visibility to good practices, guiding individual services away from a self-referential educational style, and, above all, the opportunity to project the identity of the nurseries and nursery schools to the outside community…This has been the *pedagogista's* task: to ensure that there are links between the services in order to create networks and to set down roots in the local area; and to foster a spirit of collaboration and open-mindedness in order to raise awareness and sensitivity in the local community about children's rights and the function of nurseries and nursery schools (Galardini, 2008, p.18).

A supportive infrastructure will have other elements including: team working to create an environment for discussion; seminars and conferences, local resource centres and networked preschools and schools working collaboratively; and attention to the design of preschool and school environments to create spaces that reflect and support educational values, including democracy and experimentation.

A school designed with democracy in mind

The school should be designed to enable and deepen a particular concept of education. There are many relevant dimensions of design, from the environmental to the organisational. We consider just one dimension here: size. The school as a site for democracy should be organised on a scale that supports this functioning, a scale that is conducive to democratic practice and relationships. This is an argument that has received renewed attention within education in the last twenty-five years, since the advent of Ted Sizer's *Horace's Compromise* (Sizer, 1984) and the development of the Coalition of Essential Schools in the USA, and the parallel UK movement that eventually became *Human Scale Education*. *Human Scale Education* (HSE), a UK organisation, calls in its *Practical Manifesto for Education on a Human Scale* for "schools or learning communities of 250 to 300 students", organised around teams of four to six teachers and other staff. Their organisational proposal is based on what is needed to implement what they identify as three core values: the primacy of human relationships, respect for the individual, and the importance of community – specifically a democratic community. Mary Tasker, writing for HSE, argues that:

> (m)ost teachers would embrace these values and they feature in many school mission statements as desirable educational goals. It is, however, Human Scale Education's belief that they are difficult, almost impossible to achieve in a large school where young people are not known as individuals…The fundamental argument for small schools and a human scale approach to learning is that children and young people need to be known as individuals and not as part of a mass (Tasker, 2008, pp.7-8)

Human scale – or small – schools can adopt various models. They can be built small. For example, Johansson and Moss (forthcoming) describe a Swedish school for 550 children from one to 16 years; one hundred in three preschools, with the remaining 450 ranging from preschool class (6 year olds) to grade 9 (15-year-olds). It is structured into four 'work units' (*arbetslag*): (i) two of the three preschools; (ii) one preschool + preschool and grade 1 classes; (iii) grades 2 to 5 classes; and (iv) grades 6 to 9 classes. *Arbetslag* vary from 130 to 200 children and each has a multi-professional staff team, consisting of various combinations of pre-school and school teachers and free-time pedagogues (plus a very few assistants), who are with the children throughout the extended school day, from 7 am to 6 pm.

Another model of school design that takes size and the centrality of certain kinds of human relationships seriously is 'schools-within-schools' (SWS). This model breaks down larger schools into smaller entities, doing so in ways that enable diversity within a common framework of democratic values and aspirations. There are many variants proposed and in existence. Mike Davies, a teacher and pioneer of schools-within-schools in England, outlines nine possible models, ranging from

five autonomous schools sharing a building to a series of generic home base areas with access to a range of multi-provider, experiential centres. Although the models vary on a number of dimensions (e.g. curriculum, teacher organisation, sites of learning), they have much in common and share a common commitment:

> Throughout the range of models (for schools-within-schools) there is a commitment to fewer hierarchical structures, more empowerment and the taking of decisions at the point and context of action – that is, decisions taken by those directly involved which frequently includes the students. It is, however, the commitment to relationships, to reducing alienation, to promoting identity and to recognising that personalisation will remain a seductive political slogan whilst in practice an empty concept…until the learner is known and known well (Davies, 2009, p.11).

6.4   Time for democracy and experimentation

Working democratically and experimenting with new ideas and practices is more complex and time consuming than simply following a laid-down programme with prescribed procedures and predefined outcomes. For educators, it requires time to work with children in a way that avoids hurried and superficial processes and outcomes: to borrow from the field of food, a 'slow education' movement. It requires, too, time to read, to document, to reflect and to dialogue, time for instance to participate fully in pedagogical documentation as a way of researching, planning, evaluating and developing.

Carlina Rinaldi, from Reggio Emilia, emphasises the centrality of time in their educational project:

> Listening, observing, and documenting are essential but not sufficient for our work. If we do not interpret events, we cannot share the meanings and significance of that which takes place. Interpreting is fundamental for advancing the work and growth processes of children and teachers. For this reason, a time and place must be set aside daily and also weekly in which the teachers' interpretations, hypotheses and doubts can be discussed and expanded with their other colleagues in the school.

> Every week the school staff meets to dialogue and discuss their hypotheses on the work in progress in each class by viewing the documentation together. Given that the group is formally gathered together, a wider range of issues is also addressed which are connected to the general running of the school and the system of schools. There is thus time set aside within the work schedule for these meetings (2½ hours per week). The meetings are held in the afternoon, after 4 p.m. when most of the children have gone home. The staff choose a

suitable meeting place for fostering exchange and study together, and according to the equipment needed (e.g. audio-visual materials). The only requirement is that of interaction, as this time is designed for being together: with a co-teacher, with all the school colleagues, with personnel of other schools, and the primary feature is communication (Rinaldi, 2006, pp.134-135).

Attention also needs to be given to how family members and others can have the time to participate fully in democratic and experimental services, participating in governance, evaluation and other areas of pedagogical work and engaging with new ideas, projects and concrete utopias. This leads into a much larger question – vitally important for individual and collective well-being, but beyond the scope of this paper - of the use and redistribution of time, for men and women, between paid work, caring and what Ulrich Beck (1998) calls 'public work'.

6.5 Trust in human capacity for democracy and experimentation

We saw earlier that John Dewey described democracy as a "way of personal life controlled not merely by faith in human nature in general but by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgement and action if proper conditions are furnished" (Dewey, 1939, p. 2). While Roberto Unger argued that an essential doctrine of democracy is "faith in the constructive powers of ordinary men and women" (Unger, 2005a: 67). Economist Amartya Sen has developed a theoretical framework that places human capability and individual choice at the centre of political decision making processes (Sen, 1985, 1987, 1992, 1999a, 1999b). Each individual, Sen argues, is capable of realising potential alternatives and, by doing so, of turning 'capabilities' into 'functionings'. Martha Nussbaum, critical philosopher and feminist, argues for the importance of each person's capabilities as an end in their own right (rather than as supporting the ends of others), placing individuals and their choices in cultural contexts she describes as "scenes of debate and contestation" (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 13).

Following these strong assertions of human capability, our argument here is that a democratic and experimental education has to be grounded in trust in the capabilities of people for everyday democracy and working with new ideas, practices and projects. Taking this condition of trust or faith in people engaged with education requires paying particular attention to educators and parents, what is expected of them, and their capacity to meet these expectations. It also means not treating people as incapable and untrustworthy.

In recent years, a broad consensus has been reached in national and international policy documents that emphasises the key role of the workforce for improving the quality of education – and for achieving desired *outcomes* for children. Quite often, the vantage point for the discussion is the

perceived need to 'qualify' and 'professionalise' especially those working the youngest and most vulnerable children and communities. Yet influential policy documents that promote the need for a professional educator - for example, the English Children's Workforce Strategy (Department for Education and Skill, 2005) - turn out to be manifests of distrust of practitioners on closer inspection (see Urban, 2008 for a detailed discussion). Instead of relying on – and trusting – the judgement of practitioners working closest with children and families, the documents often spell out detailed directives and expectations of how to best conduct 'professional practice'. Thus, 'professionalism' is reduced to a narrow understanding of "'applying' (educational) technology in order to achieve predetermined outcomes. As we are going to argue in more detail in the following section, this is directly counterproductive to both democratic and experimental education as it denies the actors the right to develop their practice on value-based judgements and shared learning. In a frame of narrow, technocratic professionalism, judgements are usually made for practitioners (children, families …) by others.

Similarly, discussion of parental participation can too readily assume the parent as either a consumer simply expressing preferences between products (parent choice) or as a student requiring induction into correct knowledge and practices (parent education). But in a democratic education parents need to be acknowledged as *actors* and we need to move beyond the hierarchical distinction between those who *act* (speak, know…) and those who are *acted upon*. Trust in parents as actors and equal participants in a democratic and experimental education requires the building of a strong partnership, based on trust in parental competence and an image of the (pre)school as a place of encounter. Three pedagogistas from Reggio Emilia discuss parental participation and the importance of these conditions:

> Usually, schools do not consider (parents as competent participants), because they do not see themselves as social and political places and therefore do not recognise the competencies of parents as citizens. Furthermore, by concentrating their attention on teaching various subjects, what schools consider to be important is mainly specialised knowledge that, for the most part, parents do not have.

> What do we mean by competency? ...(Parents) are competent because they have and develop their own experience, points of view, interpretation and ideas, which are articulated in implicit or explicit theories and are the fruit of their experiences as both parents and citizens. In another sense, competency is a process that is nurtured and enriched precisely by the participation processes; these processes must therefore have competency as their goal (Cagliari, Barozzi and Giudici, 2004, p.30).

In democratic and experimental education, such as Reggio Emilia, diversity, difference, and a plurality of interests and views are highly valued and worked with, not treated as problems that need to be solved.

6.6 A workforce for democracy and experimentation

We conclude by considering conditions relating to the workforce that will enable and support an education based on democracy and experimentation as fundamental values, for as we argue in the introduction to this paper, educators with an ability and desire to work with democracy and experimentation are one of the most important factors. For reasons of length, we have had to be selective in our discussion. We have focused on educators in pre-schools rather than in schools, though the issues we do consider apply to both and a key issue in any education system is the relationship between pre-school and school educators. We could also have considered here the structure of workforces in pre-schools and schools, their basic education and level of qualification, and their pay and status. But rather than consider these structural issues, important as they are, our focus is on the less tangible but equally important issues of roles and responsibilities, professionalism and professional practice and distinctions and relationships: between practice and research, and, ultimately, theory and practice.

Paolo Freire, revisiting his early work – the groundbreaking 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' – in later years, provides a starting point for our discussion of the roles, responsibilities, challenges and possibilities of professional educators in the wider context of a democratic and experimental education. Looking back at the political reality of the democratisation in Brazil, he writes:

> One of my concerns, at the time, as valid then as it is now, was with the political consequences of that kind of relationship between parents and children, which later becomes that between teachers and pupils, when it came to the learning process of our infant democracy. It was as if family and school were so completely subjected to the greater context of global society that they could do nothing but reproduce the authoritarian ideology (Freire, 2002, p.14).

Professional practice in education is inseparably linked to both the local and the global, to the micro- and macro-politics of society. But far from surrendering to the oppressive powers, Freire conceptualised professional educators as political agents of change:"The revelatory, gnosiological practice of education does not itself effect the transformation of the world: but it implies it" (Freire 2002, p. 23). The implication, here, is that there are choices to be made by those involved in educational practices: political and ethical choices whether to maintain or transform a restrictive and possibly oppressive status quo.

Individual educators, however, work in professional, institutional and socio-cultural contexts; their practices are informed by specific *ways of knowing*, e.g. about children, upbringing, learning and achieving. Moreover, their individual and collective practices unfold in highly complex and diverse situations that require, as Donald Schön (1983) put it, a particular work to be carried out by the professional: she or he needs to "make sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense" (Schön, 1983,p. 40).

The practice of education, by its very nature, is not only *uncertain*, but relational and systemic (Urban, 2008, 2010; Dalli, Miller and Urban, forthcoming). Educators work with children, families and communities; they do so in the wider context of society and within a professional community that connects individual practices to a shared body of knowledge and shared understandings. Yet, too often, the need to change and develop these practices is expressed as an expectation towards the individual practitioner, not least in scholarly discourses and policy documents. Coming from an understanding of education as first and foremost political and ethical practice (E.g. Freire, 2007; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), and as a practice that is grounded in and 'radically empowers' (Unger, 2004) democratic values, we argue that it is crucial to move beyond conceptualisations of professional educators as detached individuals. Instead, as precondition for the sustainability of democratic and experimental education, we need to promote and support a 'critically ecological' professionalism (Urban, 2007b). This would include actors at all levels of the professional system, thus challenging the divide between practitioner and researcher, and between theory and practice.

We build our argument on an international discourse on professionalism, particularly in early childhood but by no means exclusive to this field (e.g. Sachs, 2003). The debate, in recent years, has emphasised the importance of critical reflectiveness, professional autonomy and habitus over the mere acquirement of skills and techniques. At the same time, practitioners in many countries are facing a parallel and increasingly influential discourse on outcomes, quality, effectiveness etc. which leaves them with a fundamental dilemma. They are expected to achieve predetermined outcomes in a working context that is increasingly complex and diverse, uncertain and less predictable.

We begin our exploration of the professional conditions for democratic and experimental education with a discussion of the prevailing conceptualisation of the early childhood profession, which, in many countries, is constructed out of a particular, hierarchical mode of producing and applying expert knowledge. We argue that this notion of professional knowledge and practice is not appropriate for the complex field of working with children, families and diverse communities.

In the light of the work of two thinkers who have been most influential for shaping our understandings of early childhood practices – Lev Vygotsky and Paolo Freire – we then explore an alternative paradigm of a relational, systemic professionalism that embraces openness, diversity and uncertainty. This approach encourages the co-construction of professional knowledges, practices and practice-based evidence. Professional practice, learning, and research, in this frame of thinking, are understood as dialogic activities of asking critical questions and creating understandings across differences.

6.6.1   Professionalism – a new paradigm in early childhood?

In the past decade, early childhood has moved up policy agendas in an unprecedented way. Many countries have set ambitious policy goals to increase both quantity of services and quality of provision. As the OECD points out in the *Starting Strong* report (OECD, 2006), the political agendas are quite often driven by common socio-economic concerns, e.g. the wish to increase women's labour market participation and to reconcile work and family responsibilities on a basis more equitable for women. Falling birth rates and ageing population present challenges for most OECD countries, and that too gives reason to look at early childhood institutions as a possible solution (ibid.). There is a strong belief that "economic prosperity depends on a high employment/population ratio" (ibid.) and therefore policies to bring more women into the workforce have been put in place in most OECD countries.

But besides being a condition for gender equality and economic prosperity, there are other rationales, too, that have moved early childhood onto political agendas and into the public debate (cf. Penn, 2009). Early childhood is increasingly recognised as a critical period in human life. Young children's experiences, beginning with the very first day of their lives, form the basis for lifelong learning and development. But children's everyday experiences cannot be reduced to simply being the preparation for something that has yet to come. Their interactions with parents and caregivers in their families, and with practitioners in early childhood institutions, not least with other children, have a value of its own. Young children are not incomplete beings – future pupils and future adults – to be shaped through education in order to meet assumed needs of an adult society. While young children are particularly vulnerable and affected by social injustice and inequality, they are also fellow citizens with rights of their own which we must respect. But above all, early childhood is an opportunity, writes Martin Woodhead:"Each young child has a unique potential for development of human capacities, for communication and cooperation, for skill and feeling, for reason and imagination, for practicality and spirituality, for determination and compassion" (Woodhead, 1996, p.12).

Care and education for young children lies at the very heart of any human society. And it is not just something that we, as adults, provide for, or do to children. It is a fundamental need of human society: "Through the care and education of young children, a society constructs and reconstructs community and economy, ensures continuity of tradition between generations, and makes innovation and transformation possible" (ibid).

Along with an increasing division of labour, modern societies, over the last two centuries, tend to successively extend the responsibility for the upbringing of young children from the family domain to public institutions. Care and early education, which once used to be common social practices, have become specialised tasks – and occupations – for those who are specifically identified as early years practitioners: childcare workers, pre-school teachers, nursery nurses, pedagogues, to name only a few. Roles, work contexts, levels of qualification, remuneration etc, of early years practitioners always varied widely in different institutions, 'services', in different countries and in different periods of time. In recent years, however, a common thread appears to have emerged within the debate: most national and international policy documents, as well as the increasingly globalised scholarly discourse, are referring to the early years workforce and its members as something that has to be *professionalised* in order to meet the increasingly challenging requirements of the work.

Professionalism, it seems, has become the new buzzword in early childhood and it links seamlessly with the similarly prominent discourse on *quality*. There have been important European and national discussions on what quality entails in early childhood institutions and services. They include the publication, in 1996, of the *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children* by the European Commission Network on Childcare and other Measures to reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities (1996). Until to date, this is an important document as it offers a multi-dimensional framework for quality, including, among others, targets for policy, investment, participation and professionalism.

While there are good reasons, in many countries, to argue for better quality early childhood services, it is necessary to keep in mind that the concept of *quality* itself is highly problematic. It has been widely challenged for its implicit relatedness to notions of universality, technocratic manageability and measurability (Pence and Moss 1994; Urban, 2003; Dahlberg et al., 2007). Too often, the language of quality is employed to legitimise the proliferating maze of regulations in early childhood education, and to undermine instead of support professional autonomy. We should, therefore, be cautious not to lose the "shared unease" with the terminology and the implications of this concept, as Dahlberg and her colleagues remind us (2007). *Quality* remains a questionable concept, a problem that needs to be explored rather than to be presented as the solution.

At first sight, the discourses on *quality* and *professionalism* seem to merge without major difficulties. It is generally recognised today that the workforce is central for the achieving the ambitious policy goals of increasing both quantity and quality of provision. Recent research supports this notion (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva et al., 2002; Dalli, 2003, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2005; Oberhuemer, 2005) and along with policies to increase *quality*, many countries have been introducing policies that aim at *professionalising* the workforce. In England, for example, the extensive *Every Child Matters* policy (Department for Education and Skills, 2004) links explicitly to a *Children's Workforce Strategy* (ibid., 2005) that aims at building a "world-class workforce for children and young people" (ibid). The message is clear: early childhood practitioners need to be *qualified*, *trained* and *skilled* in order to achieve the highly ambitious outcomes of the strategy. In addition to that, the strategy resulted in redefining the workforce on the whole. The new status of *Early Years Professional* (EYP) has been established, introducing to – or imposing on, as some authors write (Miller, 2008) – the notion of professionalism to the early years workforce.

In work contexts that are challenging and changing, practitioners, as individuals, are increasingly expected to *act professionally* – but quite often, it remains largely obscure what that means. In the following section we are going to argue that this focus on the individual creates a number of dilemmas (for the individual practitioner as well as for the early years profession) and is part of a powerful discourse that creates a particular – and highly questionable – notion of professional practice.

6.6.2 **Talking the talk - who defines what counts as professional?**

What is a profession? How did professions come about in modern societies and what are their roles and functions? There is, of course, more than one way of approaching the answer to these questions (for a more detailed discussion see Urban, 2008). Talcott Parsons, for example, the American sociologist who looked at modern societies from a structural-functionalist perspective, saw professions as a particular way of *solving social problems* (Parsons, 1968). Parsons definition of a profession has been – and still is – highly influential. In order to fulfil their role in society, professions build social sub-systems that consist of a *central regulatory body* (in order to ensure the quality of the performance of the individual professional), a professional *code of conduct* and an effective means of *producing and managing the professional body of knowledge*. It is crucial for the professional system, according to this perspective, to have an effective control of entrance, too, as numbers, selection and training of future professionals need to be controlled.

Marxist sociologists have taken a radically different angle. A profession, they suggest, is a highly effective means of an *intellectual class* gaining influence and power, and of securing social status and economic advantage in an unequal society:

Professionalization is thus an attempt to translate one order of scare resources – special knowledge and skills – into another – social and economic rewards. To maintain scarcity implies a tendency to monopoly: monopoly of expertise in the market, monopoly of status in a system of stratification (Larson, 1977).

Whatever way we look at it, *knowledge* is central to the professional system. Whatever the actual practice, *knowledge*, and the way it is produced, distributed and applied plays a central role, and is key to power inequalities within the system. Who defines professionalism? What stands out in the debate (and in the influential policy documents) is the clear distinction between those who talk and those who are talked about. Early childhood, as a professional system, is highly stratified. There are, for instance, considerable gaps between the Education Committee of the OECD and the individual early childhood practitioner. Consultations at national level, to introduce and discuss new policies, seldom involve the practitioners who are expected to realise them. And within the professional system, the stratification is clearly visible, too.

Scholarly discussions about what it entails to be professional in early childhood often express expectations towards the individual practitioner; they seldom acknowledge the inequities of the knowledge producing and processing structures that are highly effective as tools of regulation and self-regulation. There is an *epistemological hierarchy* in our field that consists of distinct layers, where the professional body of knowledge is *produced* (academic research, scholarly debate), *transferred* (professional preparation, pre- and in-service training) and *applied* (practice). This top-down stream of knowledge and expectations constantly increases the pressure on practitioners. The hierarchical layout of the professional system also suggests there is a distinction between knowledge production and its application, between *theory* and *practice*. This theory/practice divide links well with the structural-functionalist framework, where a social *problem*, and the way it is defined, is distinct from its *solution*. In this frame of thinking, the role of the professional is clearly defined as contributing to the solution of a given social problem through applying specific knowledge and skills, which they have acquired through formalised training.

The notion of the early childhood professional as an expert, applying expert knowledge to achieve specific outcomes is part of a broader – and increasingly dominant – discourse that is concerned with guiding educational practice through scientifically provided evidence. Educational practices, not only in early childhood, have been accused of failing largely because they are not informed by educational *research knowledge*. Considerable efforts are being expended (and considerable amounts of money spent) on promoting the idea of education as an *evidence-based practice* and of teaching as an evidence-based profession (Biesta, 2007). The concept of evidence-based prac-

tice is supposed to close the gap between research, policy and practice. It does so in a very specific way that weakens democratic control over research as well as practice, Gert Biesta argues:

> On the research side, evidence-based education seems to favour a technocratic model in which it is assumed that the only relevant research questions are questions about the effectiveness of educational means and techniques, forgetting, among other things, that what counts as 'effective' crucially depends on judgements about what is educationally desirable (Biesta, 2007).

When effectiveness is defined externally, and decisions about outcomes already made, it is almost impossible for practitioners to make judgements about what is relevant or desirable for their work or to engage in meaningful dialogue with the children, families and communities they are working with. An overemphasis on evidence based-practice can disqualify practitioners and it prevents asking critical questions: "The focus on 'what works' makes it difficult, if not impossible to ask the questions of what it should work for and who should have a say in determining the latter" (ibid.).

The concept of educational practice, based on research evidence may appear neutral at first sight, but it is not, of course. Values and judgements (e.g. about what counts as evidence, what research questions are considered relevant, which methodological approaches are considered as being more valid than others etc.) lie at the very core of the concept. But the *processes* of valuing and judging are steered away from practitioners, thus systematically excluding them from the contextual meaning-making that should build the basis for professional practice. The result is a concept of professional practice as *intervention*, with the underlying assumption that professionals (as experts) act in particular ways to bring about certain effects (outcomes) that can be determined beforehand.

But early childhood practice is highly complex; many things can happen, and will happen in the day-to-day encounter with children's and families' complex and diverse life situations. It is not about pushing the 'right' buttons and, therefore, the powerful conceptualisation of the early childhood professional in a paradigm of clearly defined problems, predetermined outcomes and evidence-based, hence 'right' practice implies failure. 'Outcomes' of any interaction between early childhood practitioners and children are likely to be uncertain and surprising. Our argument is that in order to capture those surprising and uncertain 'outcomes', the professional knowledge system needs to acknowledge practitioners' experiences and systematically enable and encourage their contributions to building and interpreting the professional body of knowledge. Practitioners are key actors, not recipients, in the professional system – and so are researchers, managers, trainers etc. They all contribute to providing what we call *practice-based evidence*. The environment that encou-

rages such processes of joint learning and meaning-making can best be described as *critical learning community*.

6.6.3   Zones for democratic professional development?

Early childhood practitioners do not 'solve' given problems by applying certain technologies. Instead, they find themselves involved in meaning-making activities that require value-based decisions and experience. In his classic book on reflective practice, Donald Schön writes: "In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens. They must be constructed from the material of problem situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. In order to convert a problematic situation to a problem, a practitioner must do a certain kind of work. *He must make sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense"* (Schön, 1983: emphasis added)

From this perspective, *practice* becomes inseparable from *making sense*, hence is an inseparable part of the sphere where professional knowledge is produced. The problem remains, however, that practitioners in early childhood are scarcely recognised as co-constructors of professional knowledge and providers of practice-based evidence.

Let us look, for a moment, at the invaluable contribution Lev Vygotsky made to our understanding of how children learn. In the process of establishing itself as an academic discipline in the 19th and early 20th century, developmental psychology had successfully constructed its subject – the developing child. In line with the implicit logic of emerging scientific disciplines, this child had to be constructed as both *universal* and *distinct*, as Erica Burman (2008) argues in her book *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. The idea of a largely *decontextualised child* whose development and learning could be explored and explained by applying *scientific* methods formed the basis for many theories of child development that are influential until today. One example is the concept of developmental *stages* that follow a particular order from simple to more complex. Only if these stages are seen as universal (meaning they occur in every child, regardless of the social and material world the child grows up in) can they be employed to inform and legitimate *developmentally appropriate practices*. There are indeed many examples of early childhood programmes and practices that are seen as *right* for children of a particular age group, regardless of their life situations. Not even within developmental psychology is this view uncontested. It is by no means the only way of understanding children's learning, as Helen Penn (2008) clearly demonstrates.

Lev Vygotsky argued that children – humans – are social beings from the beginning. Their learning takes place in social interactions, which, in turn, are embedded in a complex reality determined by the social, cultural and historical context. Both aspects of his theories – learning as interaction and

the importance of the context of these interactions – are most important for early childhood practices.

First, children's learning builds on their social experiences – which may vary widely, depending on the society a child is born into: "Being poor in Mali, or even in Britain, is a different life experience from being rich in America" (Penn, 2008). Second, if children's learning takes place in interactions, then it is crucial who they interact with, and in what way. This points to the important role of teachers, or early childhood practitioners, in any learning process. Adult-child interactions, Vygotsky argued, should be based on children's *meaningful activities* – but the teacher should always encourage children to take these activities one step further. He referred to this productive tension as opening up "zones of proximal development" (Vygotsky and Cole, 1978), which provide an intellectual space where the child is "… engaged in a particular kind of meaningful activity, in which he or she wants to participate, but cannot yet carry out all actions independently" (van Oers 1995, 2003). Vygotsky is explicit about the adult's role in this interaction:" Education must be based on the student's own activity and should involve nothing more than guiding and monitoring this activity. In the interaction with children the teacher should open a zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky and Cole, 1978).

There is a widespread consensus on this social co-constructivist view on learning today. Children are not empty vessels, waiting to be filled by adults. On the contrary, they are active learners who *make sense* of the experiences and activities they are engaged in. In order to be able to open "zones of proximal development", practitioners are urged to engage in a "pedagogy of listening" (Rinaldi, 2005a). Recent research emphasises that children's exploring and meaning making activities unfold their full potential only when they are engaged in meaningful, child-led interactions between children and adults – in activities Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004) refer to as *sustained shared thinking*.

However, it remains a challenge for the early childhood professional system to encourage similar activities for adults – to systematically open *zones of professional development* among educators. Crucial questions for professional learning derive from this perspective:

• How can practitioners and students, together with parents, managers, researchers and other adult actors, become engaged in meaningful activities in order to explore, understand and change practice?
• How can they be guided and monitored – in a process of reciprocal meaning making?
• How can they be encouraged to move on to the next step – to create change?

The early childhood profession, conceptualised as *critical learning community*, would allow moving on from questioning individual practices of individual practitioners to questioning the system as a whole – including individual and collective practices in early childhood settings, in training and professional preparation and learning, in policy, administration, and research. All of these elements of the professional system are embedded in – and contributing to – the wider social, historical, economic and political context of society with its local, national, and increasingly global dimensions. They are part of a complex socio-ecological system. The challenge is to work towards a *critical ecology of the profession* (Urban and Dalli 2008) that is informed by the political and social realities that bring about knowledges and practices, "together with the use of this knowledge to *strategically transform* education in socially progressive directions" (Mac Naughton, p.3, 2003 emphasis added).

6.6.4 **Creating understandings – bringing professionalism, research and joint learning into one frame of thinking?**

Experimentation lies at the very core of democratic education, as it is only through embracing open ended processes, and systematic interest in what Paolo Freire (2002) called 'untested feasibility' that we can move beyond the 'more-of-the-same' approaches and solutions produced by the prevailing narrow understanding of evidence-based practice. For, as we have argued, research on educational practices may, at best, produce insights into what *has worked*, in a specific local and historical context. Thus, it can, and should, provide starting points for continuous interrogation of practices, shared (and contested) understandings and outcomes. To suggest that these insights indicate what *will work* in different, future situations with different individuals and groups involved, appears to us to display a naïve belief in education as a technology. From a perspective of a democratic and experimental education, as taken in this paper, limiting educational practices to *evidence-based practices* is counterproductive in two (and probably many more) ways. First, research evidence, gathered in the past and in a different context is likely to be detached from those involved in the actual educational process, evading any scrutiny, plurality, and democratic negotiation of values, purposes and concrete goals by participants. It contributes to what Gert Biesta refers to as "democratic deficit" of educational research and practice (Biesta, 2007). Second, the very promise of evidence-based practice – to reproduce what has proven to be effective – leads to closure rather than openness. It results in sterile processes that prevent, instead of encourage, invention, and innovation. Creating new understandings and 'learning from success' (Rosenfeld), embracing unexpected outcomes and surprises becomes difficult if not impossible.

Critical learning communities provide spaces for asking critical questions. They challenge the hierarchy between theory and practice, between those who produce knowledge and those who apply and deliver. Critical authors in the human and social sciences have suggested an alternative mod-

el, more suitable to make sense of the complex interactions between "self-interpreting, meaning-making human beings" (Taylor, 1995). Their thinking is rooted in the work of German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer on *hermeneutics* (Gadamer, 1960, 2004). From a hermeneutic perspective, research can be understood as a dialogic activity of *coming to an understanding*.

Hermeneutic inquiry challenges traditional approaches to research (and their inherent power inequities) as its dialogic process is something "in which one participates, not an activity over which one exercises methodological control" (Schwandt, 2004, p. 38). The mutual activity of coming to an understanding of a phenomenon, or a situation resembles Donald Schön's description of practitioners' constant engagement in reflective conversations with the situation. However, it adds a new dimension as it systematically involves all participants in the system that generates professional knowledge. Such an approach comes with a number of ethical implications. The most important questions, in a dialogic frame of thinking and acting, are not only about choosing appropriate methods for research with (as opposed to *on*) practice. They are about choices to make and about taking a stand: to being open to others and to respecting their autonomy, presuming "they possess an independence and voice we must address and by which we ourselves are addressed" (Warnke, 2002, p. 93).

Another way of re-thinking the relationship between the researcher and the researched derives from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on what they call 'transcendental empiricism'. It implies an understanding of theory and research as practices themselves – relating to, and speaking with (as opposed to *about*) other practices without assuming they have to be treated as objects, as Olsson (2009, p.96) explores. In Deleuze's own words:

> Science or theory is an inquiry, which is to say, a practice: a practice of the seemingly fictive world that empiricism describes; a study of the conditions of legitimacy of practices in this empirical world that is in fact our own. The result is a great conversation of theory to practice (Deleuze, 2001, p.36)

The – necessarily participatory – project of *creating understandings* through systematically organising dialogues in which all participants equally talk and listen challenges the hegemony of expertise and dominant knowledge and bridges the gap between the *ways of being* and the *ways of knowing* in the professional system. It offers a way to overcome the inherent dilemma of the early childhood profession as it "embraces difference, diversity, and the messiness of human life rather than seeking, in the first instance, to resolve it" (Schwandt, 2004, p.40).

Dialogue, as a key principle, guided the educational and political work of Paolo Freire throughout his life. His early work is concerned with dialogue as a way to overcome the hierarchical relationships between teacher and student, who, in the process, become teacher-students and student-teachers, "both responsible for a process in which all grow" (Freire, 2000). In his later writings he emphasises the radical nature of the dialogic project in education and society. Dialogue, he insists, is not a tool for teaching. Dialogue is a requirement of human nature and a sign of the educator's democratic stand – but also an "epistemological requirement" (Freire and Freire, 2007) as it brings together *ways of being* and *ways of knowing* of the educational practitioner-researcher.

What are the policy implications of such a reciprocal understanding of research and practice? First and foremost it will be necessary to recognise that *evidence*, i.e. the professional body of knowledge, is continuously produced by *all* actors in the professional system – which brings into the picture a new focus on practitioners' every day experiences in working with young children and their families. These experiences, as Schön (1983) argues, are gathered in situations that are complex, open and necessarily *uncertain*. Early childhood practice is itself an ongoing experiment, a continuous invention which is risky because its outcomes are not predictable. It is a practice that unfolds in situations that offer "untested feasibilities" (Freire, 2002). The 'effects' of early childhood practices are manifold and complex, as are the 'outcomes' they produce. An overemphasis of top-down models, where 'effective' practices are supposed to be guided by externally produced 'evidence' is most likely to lose sight of the surprising, promising and innovative effects and outcomes of early childhood practices. Policy can, alternatively, provide an alternative and secure framework (in terms of funding, resources, recognition) to gather, document, disseminate and theorise these experiences. It is possible, as forward-looking examples in many countries show, to reconcile the notions of evidence-based-practice with *practice-based-evidence*.[12]

Successful examples differ in their contexts, aims and approaches. However, a number of key messages can be drawn from all of them. First, they shift perspectives from the individual practitioner (who has to be professionalised in order to apply and deliver) towards the interactions between the various actors in a complex *critical ecology* of the early years professional system. *Professionalism* is understood as an attribute of the entire system that is to be developed in its reciprocal relationships.

Secondly, they point to a key feature of the professional system: its ability to encourage and systematically create spaces for asking critical questions at every layer of the system – and to value the multitude and diversity of possible answers as a key to creating new understandings. They

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[12] E.g. the Centres of Innovation initiative in New Zealand, the éist project in Ireland, the bildung:elementar project in Germany (cf. Urban 2008)

create professional learning environments with an "ethos of inquiry" (Urban 2007) and they encourage critical explorations of the context and preconditions of early childhood practice – including the cultural, historical, economic and political realities and inequalities that shape them. Paolo Freire has described this as a process of *conscientisation*. Finally, they build on a notion of *hope* – which is an ontological need, as Freire (2002) argues. Educational practice is there for a purpose and it implies change. The *hoped-for* has to be debated – and this directs the attention from the simplistic question of *what works* to questions of meaning, value and purpose.

6.7 To conclude

The starting point for this third part of our argument was that there are preconditions for democracy and experimentalism – that they require a supportive environment if they are to flourish. A fundamental responsibility lies with the professional actors across all layers of the education system: with educated educators, willing to put democratic values at the very centre of their practice; with educators able to develop professional practices with children, families, communities and fellow educators in a spirit of experimentation and mutual learning. But neither a democratic and innovative educator, nor an education system open to experimental and open ended processes will provide the sole solution to the challenges we are facing as humans locally and globally. Education, we believe with Paolo Freire, does imply change in the world. It does not, however, effect this change on its own.

In order for democratic and experimental education to flourish and to have an impact on the reality of children and adults – to gain "historical concreteness" as Paolo Freire would have put it – certain conditions for educational institutions, the profession and the wider society are indispensable. Among them we identify:

- A more equal society;
- A state that actively promotes democracy and experimentation, which would include providing and supporting
- An infrastructure for democracy and experimentation;
- A school designed for practicing democracy;
- Time and resources for educators and all those involved in democratic and experimental education;
- Trust in human capacity and capability.

As we have argued, there are preconditions within the educational system, too. The most important being a systematic shift of perspectives from the education, competence and professionalism of

the *individual* practitioner to a *competent and professional system*. Understood as a *critical ecology*, such a professional system would include actors at all levels, thus challenging counter-productive epistemological hierarchies and prevailing theory/practice divides.

We appreciate the broad consensus that has been reached, in policy and research, that the work-force is central for quality of education, bearing in mind that *quality* itself is a highly problematic concept, often linked to a discourse of technical rationality and manageability of social and educational practices. Alongside Freire, Biesta, Unger and other authors from both educational and social policy backgrounds we argue that education requires professional practices based on value judgements as much as on professional knowledge. Throughout this paper we have built the case for these values to be democratic values, and we argue that they are linked to a specific episte-mology – a *way of knowing* – that contrasts the prevailing top-down models of knowledge production-and-application. Professional knowledge in education is transient; and it is constantly co- and re-constructed by educators, children, families and others involved in educational interac-tions at local level. It is democratic and experimental in its core and, taken seriously, radically questions the concept of a profession guided by *evidence-based practice*.

In democratic and experimental education, research becomes a practice among others, speaking, as Gilles Deleuze puts it, with other practices and engaging in conversations between theory and practice. Hence we strongly believe that the development of a democratic and experimental educa-tional professionalism, and the epistemological shift towards *practice-based evidence* are inseparable. Brought together in a *critical* ecology, Democratic and experimental education, re-search and joint learning have the potential to create new knowledges and practices – and employ them to strategically transform education and its institutions.

7   What next?

We have set out an argument for an educational project based on and inscribed with democracy and experimentation as fundamental values. As we have shown, this is not an original argument, so enabling us to draw on a rich legacy of work, both theoretical and practical examples. What then might be the next steps in taking forward the argument and exploring the potential and implementation of an education based on democracy and experimentation? How might a project of transformation start?

The American sociologist Erik Olin Wright has devoted much of his work to theories of social transformation and the practice of what he terms 'emancipatory social science'. He describes this social science as "an account of a journey from the present to a possible future" containing three parts: "The critique of society (that) tells us why we want to leave the world in which we live; the theory of alternatives (that) tells us where we want to go; and the theory of transformation (that) tells us how to get from here to there" (Wright, 2007). Emancipatory social science leads Wright to an interest in 'real utopias', a term he uses to refer to "utopian ideals that are grounded in the real potentials for redesigning social institutions."

While believing in the need for imagination and vision, to help us appreciate what might be possible, he also argues the need to eschew "vague utopian fantasies", instead proposing utopian ideals that "are grounded in the real potentials of humanity, utopian destinations that have accessible waystations, utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change." So, central to his approach are practical considerations: institutional design; identifying accessible waystations - intermediate institutional innovations that move us in the right direction but only partially embody those values; attention to navigating imperfect conditions; and criteria for elaborating and evaluating real utopias. He has developed three such criteria – desirability, viability and achievability.

Desirability is about laying out values, ethics and goals:

> one asks the question: what are the moral principles that a given alternative is supposed to serve? This is the domain of pure utopian social theory and much normative political philosophy. Typically such discussions are institutionally very thin, the emphasis being on the enunciation of abstract principles rather than actual institutional designs.

Viability is about designing new policies and institutions based on desirable principles: it is

a response to the perpetual objection to radical egalitarian proposals 'it sounds good on paper, but it will never work'...(The exploration of viability focuses) on the likely dynamics and unintended consequences of the proposal if it were to be implemented. Two kinds of analysis are especially pertinent here: systematic theoretical models of how particular social structures and institutions would work, and empirical studies of cases, both historical and contemporary, where at least some aspects of the proposal have been tried.

Achievability is about the process of transformation and the practical political work of strategies for social change: "It asks of proposals for social change that have passed the test of desirability and viability, what it would take to actually implement them".

Wright argues that these three criteria are "nested in a kind of hierarchy: Not all desirable alternatives are viable, and not all viable alternatives are achievable". All three are crucial, but, in his view, the most important has to do with viability:

> Central to the problem of envisioning real utopias concerns the viability of institutional alternatives that embody emancipatory values, but the practical achievability of such institutional designs often depends upon the existence of smaller steps, intermediate institutional innovations that move us in the right direction but only partially embody those values (Wright, 2007, p. 38).

There is already a substantial body of work setting out the desirability of an education based on democracy and experimentation; we have reviewed just some of it. So, with Wright, **we think the priority should now be viability**, in particular systematic theoretical models and empirical studies of cases. This might involve three areas of work, which together might constitute the next steps:

Documentation: of examples – both narratives and critical case studies - of democratic and experimental policy and practice both past *and* present, both in Europe and beyond, and in both pre-school *and* school, to understand better why such practice develops, the forms it takes, how it can be sustained and what evaluations have been made. The book '*Democratic Schools'* edited by Michael Apple and James Beane (2007) provides a US example of this kind of documentation that can provide us with an "empirical studies of cases."

Development: of the implications for practice, provision and policy of an education based on democracy and experimentation, including the following areas:

- role of government (national, regional, local) in promoting and supporting democracy and experimentation in education

- funding of services

- evaluation of services and assessment of learners

- time and space

- curriculum

- pre-school and school workforces

As a starting point, working papers might provide "systematic theoretical models of how particular social structures and institutions would work", and form the basis for deliberation and experimentation.

Dialogue: between those who are interested in and engaged with democracy and experimentation in pre-school *and* school through the creation of what Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi (1994) refer to as 'pedagogical meeting places'. Wright's Real Utopian Project provides an interesting model, based as it is on a series of workshop conferences, each based on basic institutions – property rights and the market, secondary associations, the family, the welfare state – at which "groups of scholars are invited to respond to provocative manuscripts". Each conference has resulted in an edited volume, in which groups of scholars respond to an initial and provocative essay. A similar model might be applied to education, extended perhaps to include politicians, policy makers and others.

None of these areas, individually or together, constitute a sweeping programme of reform. Yet they are important. They open up spaces for re-constructing and renewing education; for connecting past, present and future; and for envisaging new relationships – between pre-school and school, between children, parents and educators, between education and society, and between society and environment. They provide opportunities for democratic deliberation, situated in a broad analysis of the state humankind finds itself in and based on a modus *vivendi* model of acknowledged plurality of values and perspectives. They create fertile ground for new ideas, without which, as Unger observes, we cannot overthrow 'the dictatorship of no alternative' (Unger, 2005, p.1). If, as many argue today, the future is only certain to the extent that 'more of the same, but better' is nei-

ther feasible nor desirable, documentation, development and dialogue offer important possibilities for starting a process of what Unger terms 'radical reform'.

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9 Authors

Peter Moss

Peter Moss is Professor of Early Childhood Provision at the Institute of Education, University of London (Thomas Coram Research Unit, TCRU) and has international reputation in the field. Between 1986 and 1996, Professor Moss was Co-ordinator of the European Commission Network on Childcare and other Measures to Reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities, an expert group set up by the European Commission and running over two of its Equal Opportunities Programmes. The work of the network on ECEC, leave policies and gender issues in childcare gained an international reputation for its breadth and quality and resulted in the publication of over 30 reports. His international reputation in the field has been recognised by being invited to act as Rapporteur to two of the 20 national reviews undertaken as part of the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care (1998-2005). Most recently, Professor Moss has been editor of Children in Europe since its inception in 2001; this unique magazine is published in 10 European countries and in 10 languages. In 2004, Professor Moss was the co-founder (with Dr. Fred Deven from CBGS, the Flemish Population and Family Study Centre) of an international network on leave policy and research, which now has members from 23 countries. Over his career, Professor Moss has authored and co-authored numerous influential books and articles. Recent books on the subject of ECEC which he has authored or edited include: Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Postmodern Perspectives (1999, 2007, with Gunilla Dahlberg and Alan Pence), London: Routledge; From Children's Services to Children's Spaces (2002, with Pat Petrie), London: Routledge; and Ethics and Politics in Early Childhood Education (2005, with Gunilla Dahlberg), London: Routledge, and Radical Education and the Common School: a Democratic Alternative'(2010, with Michael Fielding), London: Routledge.

Mathias Urban

Mathias Urban is Associate Professor (Reader in Education) at the Cass School of Education, University of East London. He researches and publishes internationally on questions of professionalisation in early childhood education, and practice-based evidence. He is director of the international professional doctorate programme at the Cass School of Education. Mathias chairs an international Special Interest Group on 'Professionalism in Early Childhood' (with Carmen Dalli, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand). Currently he leads a pan-European research project on Competence Requirements of Staff in Early Childhood Education and Care (CORE), funded by the European Commission. In his publications he has been critiquing the expertisation and technical rationalisation of pedagogical practice and has been analysing alternatives in international case-based comparative studies. His recent projects and publications include: Strategies for Change, 2006, 2007; Dealing with uncertainty: challenges and possibilities for the early childhood profession, 2008, 2010; Early Childhood Education in Europe, 2009; Re-thinking professionalism in Early Childhood: untested feasibilities and critical ecologies, 2010. Before mov-

ing to London, Mathias Urban worked at the Faculty of Education, Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg where he led the Early Childhood and Profession Unit (Arbeitsstelle Elementare Bildung und Profession) and drirected the development of the 'Bildung:elementar early childhood curriculum for the state of Saxony-Anhalt. From 1999 to 2003 he participated in the "National Quality Initiative in Systems of Early Childhood Institutions (NQI)" (subproject IV, Qualität im Situationsansatz', with Christa Preissing, Elke Heller, Jana Köpnick and Regine Schallenberg-Dieckmann). Mathias Urban was co-founder and long-standing speaker of the ‚Kronberger Kreis für Qualitätsentwicklung' (Qualität im Dialog entwickeln (1998), Seelze/Velber: Kallmeyer, (Dialogic Quality Development).

Autoren

Peter Moss

Peter Moss ist Professor of Early Childhood Provision am Institute of Education, University of London (Thomas Coram Research Unit, TCRU). Seine Internationale Reputation gründed u.a. auf seiner führenden Rolle im Netzwerk Kinderbetreuung der Europäischen Kommission von 1986 bis 1996 (European Commission Network on Childcare and other Measures to Reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities). 1996 veröffentlichte das Netzwerk Kinderbetreuung 'Qualitätsziele in Einrichtungen für kleine Kinder', ein bis heute richtungsweisendes Dokument. Peter Moss war Berichterstatter für zwei der insgesamt 20 Länderberichte der beiden OECD-Studien ‚Starting Strong' (2001, 2006), Herausgeber des in 10 Ländern und Sprachen erscheinenden Magazins Children in Europe (Kinder in Europa) und ist Mitbegründer eines internationalen Netzwerks zu Fragen der Elternzeit. Peter Moss ist Autor und Ko-Autor einer Vielzahl von einflussreichen Büchern und Beiträgen in wissenschaftlichen Zeitschriften; darunter ‚Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care' (1999, 2007, mit Gunilla Dahlberg und Alan Pence) und ‚Radical Education and the Common School: a Democratic Alternative' (2010)

Mathias Urban

Mathias Urban ist Associate Professor (Reader in Education) an der Cass School of Education, University of East London. Er forscht und veröffentlicht international zu Fragen der Professionalisierung der Frühpädagogik und praxis-basierter Evidenz und leitet das internationale Doktorandenprogramm der Cass School of Education. Mathias ist Leiter der internationalen Special Interest Group ‚Professionalism in Early Childhood' (zusammen mit Carmen Dalli, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand). Zurzeit leitet er ein Europaweites Forschungsprojekt zu Kompetenzanforderungen in der Frühpädagogischen Praxis (CORE), finanziert von der Europäischen Kommission. In seinen Veröffentlichungen bezieht er kritisch Stellung zu Expertisierung und technischer Rationalisierung pädagogischer Praxis und untersucht Alternativen in Fallbasierten internationalen Vergleichsstudien (u.a. ‚Strategies for Change, 2006, 2007; Dealing with uncertainty: challenges and possibilities for the early childhood profession, 2008, 2010; Early Childhood Education in Europe, 2009; Re-thinking professionalism in Early Childhood: untested feasibilities and critical ecologies, 2010). Vor seinem Wechsel nach London arbeitete Mathias Urban an der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg in der Leitung der Arbeitsstelle ‚Elementare Bildung und Profession'. Von 1999 bis 2003 war er an der Nationalen Qualitätsinitiative im System der Tageseinrichtungen für Kinder (NQI) beteiligt (Teilprojekt IV, ‚Qualität im Situationsansatz', mit Christa Preissing, Elke Heller, Jana Köpnick und Regine Schallenberg-Dieckmann). Mathias Urban war Mitbegründer und langjähriger Sprecher des ‚Kronberger Kreises für Qualitätsentwicklung' (Qualität im Dialog entwickeln, 1998).