Genealogies of Governmentality: Producing and Managing Young Children and Their Education

Jo Ailwood
Charles Sturt University

Abstract

Genealogies, or histories of the present, create critical spaces to remind us of the non-necessity of that which we consider necessary to our lives (Burchell 1993). Further, genealogies of governmentality attempt to create this space with a focus on how conduct is conducted. In this paper I suggest that genealogies of governmentality are one way to create critical analyses of the education of young children. Sociologies of childhood consider childhood to be a relational concept, functioning in relation to adulthood. I argue that genealogies are one way to illuminate these relationships, in particular pointing towards the ways in which the education of young children is deeply embedded in a range of complex and contradictory 'adult' discourses and knowledges, including those of motherhood, politics, worker, citizen and the economy. To illustrate this I provide an analysis of the provision of preschool education in Queensland's government schools.

> [T]he idea that human sciences like educational studies stand outside or above the political agenda of the management of the population or somehow have a neutral status embodied in a free-floating progressive rationalism are dangerous and debilitating conceits. (Ball 1998, p. 76)

> [T]here is a complex interplay between society and its institutions for children which … casts doubt over the redemptive hopes invested by politicians and policy makers in children's services. If we know how to read them, public provisions for children offer narratives about their society, its values and dominant understandings. (Moss and Petrie 2002, p. 171)

Nicolas Rose has stated that 'childhood is the most intensely governed sector of personal existence' (1999a, p. 123). Rose originally made this comment in the 1980s, referring to understandings of childhood in the twentieth century to that point. That the shape and intensity of this governing is shifting, in concert with shifting modes for the governing of adults, is the central focus of my research. The two opening quotations above, from different studies and within different contexts, reflect two key ideas I consider within the theoretical and analytical framework provided by governmentality. The first of these is centred on the need to engage with political agendas and the management of the population as a powerful site for thinking about early childhood education and the construction and regulation of young children. The second key idea maintains that such an engagement has the potential to produce critical narratives of politics, society and the institutions adults create and regulate for young children.

Childhood may be the most heavily governed sector of existence; however, it is not often viewed as such in studies of early childhood education or of the institutional frameworks invented for childhood. Rather, dominant amongst studies of childhood has been a concern for maintaining childhood as natural and innocent. Following Rose (1999b), and before him Foucault, I aim to present a critical and diagnostic approach to the analysis of preschool education that considers preschool education and understandings of young children as socially, culturally, politically and historically constructed. This approach offers a way to consider how early childhood education has been thought about, taking into account understandings of childhood, teacherhood and motherhood. It also entails an analysis of the tactics and strategies that have been invented to regulate and manage all who inhabit early childhood settings.

Moss and Petrie (2002), in the quotation that opens this paper, point out that analyses of the institutions adults create for young children can provide revealing social narratives. Hultqvist (1998, p. 96) has also suggested that 'the pre-school child … is about social regulation, that is about the regulation and construction of the child as an agent of change in relation to "administrative patterns found in larger society"'. Understanding childhood from this perspective requires an acknowledgement that it is deeply embedded in social, political and historical contexts. Further, it points towards the significance of childhood, particularly early childhood, as a time of intervention, shaping and moulding 'agents of change for the future'.

This paper first discusses genealogies of governmentality. I then move on to consider two significant junctures in the establishment of preschool education in Queensland government schools. Considering these two moments from the perspective of a genealogy of governmentality provides an illustration of the way in which early

childhood education is set within specific political agendas while also producing a narrative of society, its values and dominant understandings of young children and their education.

Genealogies of governmentality

My approach to this critical and diagnostic engagement has been via developments of Foucault's notion of governmentality. Such an analysis of the shifting modes of regulation and governing of childhood requires a particular orientation to history and to politics. In Foucauldian terms, this orientation is genealogical. Genealogies do no searching for foundations or underlying truths. Rather, they search for accidents, contingencies, overlapping discourses, threads of power and, importantly, conditions of possibility for the production of commonsense, taken-for-granted truths. A genealogical starting point is, as Burchell (1993, p. 279) suggests, 'the non-necessity of what passes for necessity in our present'. From these beginnings it is then possible to focus 'on what we typically hold to be ahistorical, self-evident, and substantial in order to reveal its rootedness in history' (Mahon 1992, p. 124).

Towards the end of his life, Foucault began extending his genealogical studies to more explicitly encompass his analytics of governmentality (Foucault 2000a). The tools Foucault provided in his governmentality writings provide a useful entrée into the links and connections, power relations and accidents that form the basis of the regulation and management of young children and their education.

Understanding government as 'the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour', Foucault (1997, p. 81) was interested in the operations of government both of populations and of individuals over themselves. In other words, he was interested in 'the conduct of conduct' (Foucault 2000a). Studies of governmentality are concerned not only with the regulatory practices of a particular state, but also with the conditions of possibility that are created in which individuals govern themselves and others. The conduct of conduct, therefore, refers not only to the obvious and overt ways in which a state governs, but also to the more mundane and everyday ways in which groups and individuals govern each other and individuals govern themselves.

Studies of governmentality are practical, for, as Dean (1999, p. 18) points out, 'to analyse mentalities of government is to analyse thought made practical and technical'. Studies of governmentality are concerned with the ways in which particular knowledges at particular moments become established within circuits of power, forming regimes of truth, practice and thought. Language is pivotal to the formation of regimes of truth, practice and thought, creating intelligible subjects and providing

'a mechanism for rendering reality amenable to certain kinds of action' (Miller and Rose 1990, p. 7). It is necessary here to make the point that language also renders reality amenable to inaction, exclusion and silence. For, as Foucault (1978) argued, discursive exclusions, marginalisations and silences are as central to the functioning of discourses as that which is overt.

Early childhood education is a nodal point at which many knowledges and discourses surrounding childhood, families and parenting, schools and education intersect. These knowledges and discourses constitute, and are constituted through, the multitude of institutional and organisational methods for managing and producing childhood in early childhood educational settings. Such methods of management also operate in ways that define possible childhoods, while simultaneously creating and encouraging desire for such childhoods within individual children, parents and teachers.

Foucault suggested that governmentality operates on multiple levels in various complex, contingent and changeable ways. He emphasised the importance of encompassing the structural, institutional and organisational means of political government as well as the means through which individuals governed themselves and others. It is important to note that, while these contexts exist and produce particular power relations and regimes of truth and practice, they are not fixed or imposed and may therefore be resisted or altered. I do not wish to suggest that the governing strategies and tactics of the state are absolute. I do, however, wish to suggest that they have regulatory effects upon what sorts of practices are enabled and/or constrained in early childhood settings.

A genealogy of governmentality enables a critical diagnosis of the ways in which subjects are governed, govern themselves and each other. These questions arise out of an interest in subjectivity that is not focused upon 'the texture of lived experience, but with regimes of truth and discursive effects' (McLeod 2001, p. 97). They also reflect the two key traces mentioned at the beginning of this paper; that is, an interest in both the political management of populations and how this management is reflected in institutions created for children. I am concerned, therefore, to introduce 'a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable' (Rose 1999b, p. 20).

Preschool in Queensland government schools

An analysis of preschool education in Queensland's government schools provides one example of the way in which genealogies of governmentality can illuminate the discursive complexities and contradictions that function to create the conditions of

possibility for early childhood education. Queensland's particular political history is especially interesting, given the deeply conservative beginnings of preschool in Queensland's government schools and the more recent shifts to less conservative, but more explicitly interventionist, governments. This is then layered with the added complexities arising from Australia's federal system of government, and Queensland's defence of its educational system. In what follows I develop this narrative, considering some of the surrounding political, historical and social discourses that provide the conditions of possibility for changing tactics of governance in early childhood education.

Over the last few years in Queensland there has been much public debate regarding the government's provision of preschool education. This debate can be read as aligned with shifts in thought about childhood and the purpose of preschool education. The current shifts in thought about preschool education have emerged from much broader shifts in thought about education, knowledge and the economy. The following discussion focuses on the conditions of possibility for preschool education, rather than specific tactics of government, although these are touched upon. In this paper, therefore, I am concerned with the way in which early childhood education is invented within social and political discourses and historical contexts.

Establishing state-based preschool in Queensland

The Queensland government's provision of preschool education began in 1973 during the time of Bjelke-Petersen as Premier. Given the federal nature of Australia's political system, this provision needs to be placed within the context of various federal government happenings. During the early 1970s preschool education for all was high on the Whitlam federal government's agenda. As Whitlam had stated,

> If the university is the roof, then pre-schools are the foundations of education in a modern community … we will therefore establish a Pre-Schools Commission to ensure that with Commonwealth help every child in Australia has the opportunity of pre-school education. (1969, p. 8)

At the federal level Whitlam's discourses of preschool were based within his government's much broader commitment to free education, from preschool through to university.

The Whitlam government had also inherited the newly passed *Child Care Act 1972*, enabling the federal government to provide subsidies to some childcare services, so some women could return to the paid workforce. The Act followed the recent removal of the Commonwealth marriage bar, which had forced women to resign on marriage from public service positions, thus reopening these employment options for

married women. Although femocrats were major players in the implementation of the Act, as Brennan and O'Donnell (1986) point out, the Act was by no means a signal for mothers to begin working beyond the home. Definitions of children who had priority access to childcare centres excluded, to a large degree, the children of families where both parents worked outside the home (since the funding was to free community-based centres – many women who worked made use of private centres). Through the Act, research was also to be conducted into the reasons women entered the workplace, and parents wanting to place very young children (less than three years old) in childcare centres were obliged to seek family counselling.

The early 1970s also coincided with not only the 'second wave' feminist movement, but a range of other social upheavals across the world and in Australia; for example, gay rights, civil rights and anti-Vietnam war protests. For the Whitlam government these movements provided the discursive backdrop within which government policies, including childcare and education, were based. The Whitlam government was not only committed to child care as a right for all mothers, especially those who worked outside of the home, it was also proposing a significant level of federal intervention into the states' and territories' educational provisions. During the relatively short term of their office (1972–1975) the Whitlam government achieved a number of its educational goals. It first organised an Australian Schools Commission, which was to be the formal structure for the federal government's role in schooling. The commission then introduced the Disadvantaged Schools Programme, conducted reviews of Aboriginal education and of girls' education, abolished university fees and brought universities under the control of the federal government (Whitlam 1985). The Whitlam government, therefore, while lurking around the early years of education, was positively stomping around in other educational areas.

In Queensland, Bjelke-Petersen took pride in the level of obstruction and opposition he managed to maintain against all federal governments, and particularly the Whitlam Labor government (Bjelke-Petersen 1990). For a reactionary Queensland state government, the threat of federal intervention into the provision of early education is likely to have impacted upon decisions surrounding the introduction of a preschool year.

Around 1972 Queensland's Department of Education and Cultural Activities (DECA) produced various unpublished essay-style documents that provided the foundational knowledge bases for the introduction of Queensland's state preschool system. These documents also fed into the *Preschool Teachers' Handbook* (*Handbook*) that was the core guide for preschool teachers for many years. One of the documents contained a survey of current research into preschool education. This survey was not concerned to justify the implementation of preschool education, as that decision had already

been made. Rather, it was concerned with *how* to go about making this provision. In the words of the survey,

> what are the 'right conditions'? How can the limited resources available in the immediate future best be mobilized to achieve these 'right conditions'? (DECA c1972, p. 1)

The survey contributed to, and reflected, the government's problematisation of preschool education. Further, it formed a significant basis for the development of regimes of truth and the production of strategies of government regarding the establishment of preschools in Queensland's government schools.

The survey emerged largely from contemporary psychological concerns with development and social compensation. In discussing the importance of the early years for subsequent development, the text took studies of the development of baby animals as a core research base, extrapolating these findings to young children. The use of baby animal research, referred to as 'infrahuman' research, immediately positions the young children in question as less than human, or at least less than adult. The survey of child development research provided also relied on the work of individuals such as Piaget, Bloom, Hunt and Kagan. As such, the report produced a scientific and biological regime of truth based on a combination of the work of various child psychologists that valorised the effect of early experiences and the production of 'adaptive' behaviours.

The survey is explicit in stating that preschool education has a compensatory role for the 'deficiencies' found in children of low socioeconomic groups. For example, referring to the work of American psychologists and educators Bereiter and Englemann, the survey suggested that

> disadvantaged children of three to five years are generally retarded by a year or more on all intellectual abilities and that the greatest retardation generally occurs in those abilities that are most crucial to school success, namely language and reasoning ability. (DECA c1972, p. 7)

This point is reflected in the positioning of preschool education within the *Handbook*. Here, preschool was for 'bringing children up to the normal level of readiness in the basic primary school subject' (Department of Education, Queensland c1978, p. 8).

While some prominent early childhood educators such as Joan Fry (1971), the then Principal of the Sydney Nursery School Training College, supported discourses of social compensation, it was not uncontested. Various early childhood education

academics had challenged this limited view of the purposes of early childhood education. For example, in America, Barbara Biber (1969) gave a paper challenging Head Start at the National Association for the Education of Young Children conference, a paper subsequently reproduced in the *Australian Pre-School Quarterly*. In Australia, Gerald Ashby (c1972) and Stella Woodroffe (1973) were among those challenging the discourses of social compensation. Interestingly, Ashby (c1972) wrote his critique from his position as the first Director of Pre-School Education in Queensland's Department of Education. Ashby was uneasy about the emphasis on early intervention from a social compensation perspective. He stated:

> While it is accepted that the actual implementation of these programs may demonstrate greater concern for the individual, humane compassion and the enhancement of the child's experiences than appears in reports, such reports, alledgedly [sic] educational, frequently manifest a paucity of concern for anything that is not measurable. It seems that if the reports themselves are to be the historic record of such inteventionary [sic] programs the saga to be conveyed to future generations is one of mechanistic manipulation, lost opportunity and the plundering of childhood with all its varigated [sic] potential. (c1972, n.p.)

Such strong objection from an early childhood academic in an authoritative position may have had some effect. There remained, however, a strong compensatory consideration that preschools were to be established in areas of greatest need (DECA c1972). Preschool education, therefore, was established in Queensland government schools with a significant assertion of its compensatory value. The three dominant themes of compensatory education – intellectual development, language development and home–school relationships – were explicitly addressed in the production of the *Handbook* (Department of Education, Queensland c1978).

Alongside the emphasis on social compensation, Bjelke-Petersen was vocal in his rejection of feminist claims for child care, asserting that such claims were a slight on motherhood. Given these contexts, preschools were established on a voluntary, sessional, kindergarten model – a model that did not disrupt the valorisation of motherhood and family. Indeed, it supported and governed the 'right' sort of motherhood, as the voluntary assistance of mothers in preschools was central to the production of home–school partnerships (Department of Education, Queensland c1978).

Learning or earning in the 'Smart State'

The production and management of preschool education in Queensland government schools, while relatively stable, has not remained uncontested. Various context-altering events have occurred over the last couple of decades, for example, a range of curriculum documents produced in the 1980s were rationalised into the Preschool Curriculum Guidelines, implemented from 1998. Currently, however, a significant rupture is under way. In March of 2002, as one of three components of the Queensland government's *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* policy (Queensland Government 2002), a trial of a full-time preparatory year of education in Queensland's government schools was announced. This announcement is part of a concentrated attempt on the part of the Queensland government to focus all its policy and programmes around the production of Queensland as 'the Smart State'. The trial began in 2003 and continues into 2004 and 2005 with increasing numbers of schools taking part (visit <http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/preschool/prep/index.html> for more information on the trial and a research report).

The Queensland government's Smart State agenda is a proactive, rather than reactive or stagnant, regime. The language and marketing of the Smart State regime from the government are universally positive, upbeat and progressive. However, as Foucault (1982) pointed out, all discourses must be considered potentially dangerous. Thus, while the discursive regime of the Smart State holds enormous and positive potential for education in Queensland, it must also remain open for analysis and critique. Genealogically, it is important to set the preparatory year trial within a range of 'big picture' discourses; including those of postmodernism, globalisation and knowledge-based economies. Central and explicit to the Smart State regime are knowledge-based economies and it is this I will discuss here.

Knowledge-based economies in neo- and advanced liberal nations

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development suggests that 'the term "*knowledge-based economy*" results from a fuller recognition of the role of knowledge and technology in economic growth' (OECD 1996, p. 9, original emphasis). This recognition points towards the rapid growth in industries that depend upon the production and distribution of knowledge, which in turn both create and depend upon workers who are able to utilise, manage, produce and distribute such knowledge. This trend towards knowledge-based economies is evident in many countries, particularly those considered 'developed' or industrial.

Western, English-speaking nations that maintain or aspire to knowledge-based economies are generally based within neo- (and more recently advanced) liberal understandings of society and government. That is, within a society that valorises

individual freedom, choice and responsibility and a government that functions from a distance with an emphasis on market economies (Marginson 1993, Yeatman 1994). Rose (1999b) also suggests that neo-liberal forms of government are shifting and merging with what he terms advanced liberal forms of government. These forms of advanced liberal government are based around the government of expertise, making use of regulatory strategies such as benchmarking and performance indicators.

Rose (1996, 1999b) suggests that the worker/citizen, central to the success of neo- and advanced liberal societies functioning within knowledge-based economies, is a self-maximising entrepreneur. Such a worker/citizen is exhorted to lifelong learning; to constant and ongoing engagement with rapid flows and networks of, for example, information, communication, work and money. This worker/citizen is also to submit to a vast network of surveillance including performance monitoring, accountability and benchmarking.

This understanding of the worker/citizen is, as feminists have argued (e.g. Blackmore 2000, Ozga 2000), rather limited and based in particular conceptualisations of rational, individual masculinity. The place of women within neo- and advanced liberal notions of the worker/citizen is often ambiguous. While in some ways women's lives are being transformed, in other ways there is a re-emphasis on the 'traditional' work of women (Ahmed, Kilby, Lury, McNeil and Skeggs 2000). Recognising these shifts in understanding motherhood and the woman worker/citizen of neo- and advanced liberal societies is important for early childhood as they are closely linked to our understandings of young children.

However, reading through the range of the literature that has emerged, particularly in the 1990s, around the concept of governmentality I was taken aback to find so little that considered categories of difference. While there is governmentality research considering, for example, race (O'Malley 1998) and sexuality (Dowsett 1998), most remains predominantly masculine. Given the explicit linkage between various modes of liberal government and studies of governmentality, the lack of engagement with feminist critiques of liberalism is a gap that requires attention. My research also aims, therefore, to move on from this masculinised version of governmentality to begin taking account of the gendered ways in which subjects are governed. In early childhood education, given the way in which women and children are tied within a Gordian knot, to ignore the gendered aspects of governing would be a significant oversight. Considering the implications and nuances of gender enables a more detailed account of the conditions of possibility for the governing of subjects who live and work within the early childhood years.

Australia is one nation that is produced out of discourses of neo-liberalism, and more recently aspects of advanced liberalism. Within this context, the state government of

Queensland has embraced the dominant and widespread discourses of knowledge-based economies. The mantle of the knowledge-based economy has been spread across all sectors of government in Queensland within the unifying slogan of 'Queensland, the Smart State'. The Smart State agenda of Queensland's government provides opportunities for shifting institutional arrangements, particularly for major sectors such as education. This agenda, produced as it is in a language of new jobs, new citizens, new economies and new education, has provided the conditions of possibility for a revision and renewal of preschool education in Queensland.

Changing the ways worker/citizens are thought about has 'knock-on effects' for ways of thinking about childhoods. Since childhood is a relational concept (Buckingham 2000), it is usually understood and thought about within its relationship with adulthood. Therefore, put quite crudely, modern liberal thought of rational adulthood required a childhood that produced modern liberal adults. For example, the dominant understanding of early childhood education produced through developmental psychology is premised upon the universal child's rational progression to a modern, liberal and rational adulthood. Neo-liberal and advanced liberal thought of adulthood requires new childhoods; childhoods that will produce lifelong learners, self-maximisers – the autonomous and rational worker/citizens required in neo-liberal and advanced liberal societies with knowledge-based economies.

Queensland's Smart State regime: learning or earning for all young people

The Queensland Studies Authority's (QSA) outline of the early years curriculum project makes the minister's agenda regarding the trial clear. The preparatory year is to be very much about preparing for the compulsory years of schooling – or getting ready for school. The project profile points out that 'The Minister … advised that this curriculum was to include an Early Learning and Development Framework that would guide teachers' monitoring of children's progress and their preparedness for Year 1 – that is, their "school readiness"' (QSA 2002, n.p.). Areas that were identified for particular attention in the Early Years Curriculum project 'are social and self-organisational skills, motor development and early literacy, numeracy and oracy' (QSA 2002, n.p.). While these are all laudable areas of attention, the list is also striking in its adherence to a rather traditional view of the school for which children are getting ready. Given that Queensland is to be the Smart State and that information and communication technologies are fundamental to that vision, it does seem that the exclusion of these from the preparatory year 'wish list' could be considered as lacking in foresight.

The preparatory year trial sits within the overarching corporate policy, Queensland State Education 2010. This policy asserts that Queensland government's Smart State regime is centrally concerned with 'add[ing] value to individuals and to the common good by giving the opportunity to all, irrespective of background or circumstance, to reach the highest

levels of schooling attainment' (Education Queensland 2001, p. 12). Within this discourse, the preparatory year is strategically aimed towards laying 'the appropriate foundation for success in school for all students' (Education Queensland 2001, p. 16). As Rose (1999b, p. 145) points out, in advanced liberal societies the government's 'political responsibility is to provide … training, combat discrimination, help with childcare for lone parents … But your political responsibility as a citizen is to improve your own lot through selling your labour on the market'. This is very much the political rationality underpinning the Smart State discourse and the preparatory year trial. For young children in Queensland, the preparatory year trial is aimed towards getting them ready for a lifetime of learning or earning as they grow into the twenty-first century.

Within the political rationality of Queensland's Smart State regime the preparatory child is predominantly produced as a potential adult *learner* or *earner*. This is a shift from the more broadly dominant political rationality of a child being a *developer* who is a potential rational adult. Thus, while young children remain potential adults, the adults they are to become are less certain, less structured, more flexible and more reflexive. Within the Queensland government's discourses at least, the dominant early childhood developmental agenda has been watered down and marginalised. Therefore, whilst the developmental agenda remains, it is now in serious competition with notions of preparation for compulsory schooling and laying the foundations for lifelong learning.

Conclusion

Genealogies, or histories of the present, create critical spaces to remind us of the non-necessity of that which we consider necessary to our lives (Burchell 1993). Further, genealogies of governmentality attempt to create this critical space with a focus on how conduct is conducted. Thinking through the non-necessity of our perceived necessities, and linking this in with how we are governed, enables not only an acknowledgement of the way in which our daily lives are governed and managed, but also of the potential for shifts and changes in this governing.

One function of the cutting away of the common sense foundations of early childhood education is the revelation of the accidents, power struggles, political and personal game playing, and economic agendas that have functioned to produce, and that continue to maintain and manage, early childhood education. This cutting away is in part an academic exercise, producing a means for thinking through societies, politics and histories. However, it does also serve a positive purpose; for in understanding how we do things, an understanding of how to do things differently may also arise. As Foucault suggested,

> Criticism consists in uncovering … thought and trying to change it: showing that things are not as obvious as people believe, making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted. To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy. (2000b, p. 456)

The motivation for this research lies in the knowledge that there are spaces and opportunities for thinking differently about early childhood education; and for thinking differently about how the teachers, children and parents who inhabit these spaces are constructed, regulated and governed.

In Queensland, there is currently a window of opportunity for thinking differently about young children and their education. For the next year or so as the 'getting ready for school' trial progresses, new political rationalities will emerge and new tactics, strategies and techniques for the governing of preschool/preparatory spaces and subjectivities will be invented. The question of 'how to govern' is currently being asked, and the shape and intensity of the governing of those who inhabit preschools is sure to change.

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