

Racialization in Early Childhood: A Critical Analysis of Discourses in Policies

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Introduction

A large portion of the early childhood literature in the area of cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity addresses the practices of institutions for young children, immigrant/refugee parents' understandings of their situation, and provides recommendations for more inclusive practices (Bernhard, Chud, Lefebvre, & Lange, 1996; Bernhard & Gonzalez-Mena, 2000; Bernhard, Lefebvre, Chud, & Lange, 1997; Bernhard, Lefebvre, Kilbride, Chud, & Lange, 1998; Chang, Muckelroy, Pulido-Tobiassen, & Dowell, 2000; Derman-Sparks & A. B. C. T. Force, 1989; Gonzalez-Mena, 1991, 1996; Gonzalez-Mena & Bhavnagri, 1997). This body of literature has proved very useful in bringing issues related to young children and families from racialized minorities to the forefront of discussions in early childhood. What has not been widely discussed (and problematized) are the assumptions made in policies that guide early childhood services. Most of the existing critical policy analyses that have been conducted in the field do not directly address racialized discourses (e.g., Moss, Dillon, & Statham, 2000; Moss & Petrie, 2002). There are,

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however, important exceptions that focus primarily on welfare reforms (e.g., Swadener, 2000).

This article attends to this gap in the literature by reporting on a study conducted in British Columbia, Canada that addressed the following questions:

How do discourses that guide early childhood policies within British Columbia represent young children and families from 'racialized' minorities (Aboriginal, Canadian, and foreign-born)?

What assumptions and surrounding bodies of knowledge about young children and families from 'racialized' minorities organize existing policy discourses?

What issues do these discourses claim to, or intend to, resolve?

Before proceeding, two notes are necessary in order to situate the ideas we are about to discuss. First, the aim of this article is to *interrogate* the policies that guide early childhood services in the province. As Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000) explain, most policy research that deals with issues of inclusion/exclusion tend to accept the definitions and norms created by policies, "the research situates itself within the same framework as its objects of study and its results become nothing more than recapitulation of given systems of reference in state policy rather than a knowledge produced through critical analysis" (p. 6). In this article we intend to engage in a space of critical analysis. Second, we also want to move away from the creation of culturally essentialising categories that are primarily concerned with group-based cultural differences (Andreassen Becher, 2004). Our aim, following Lee and Lutz (2005), is to utilize "a critical literacy of 'race,' racisms, anti-racisms and racialization", involving "critical 'readings' of how power operates and how it transforms, and reforms, social relations, through racial categories and consciousness" (p. 4).

Multiculturalism and Aboriginality in British Columbia, Canada

Canada is imagined as a pluralistic, multicultural society that accepts a large number of immigrants every year. The rhetoric of multiculturalism has been analyzed by many scholars and we tackle this issue below. For now, we want to state the larger politics in which early childhood policies are constructed and acted upon. The imagined positive disposition toward multiculturalism is reflected in the *Multiculturalism Act* (1988) (Canadian Heritage-Patrimoine canadien, 2004) that states:

3. (1) It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to
- (a) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage;
 - (b) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future...
 - (j) advance multiculturalism throughout Canada in harmony with the national commitment to the official languages of Canada. (Multiculturalism Policy of Canada, Section 3. 1)

Immigrants account for approximately 18% of the total population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001c). A large number of immigrants arriving in Canada (approximately 1.5 million) come from non-European countries including countries in Asia, the Middle East and Latin America (Statistics Canada, 2001a). The majority of immigrants choose to reside in one of the three major multicultural centres (Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver) which combined, according to the 2001 Census, attract approximately 62% of the total immigrant population (Statistics Canada, 2001b). Vancouver, one of the larger multicultural centres in Canada, is situated in the province of British Columbia.

British Columbia's Multiculturalism Act also reflects much of this imagined positive disposition toward multiculturalism that is seen in Canada's Multiculturalism Act. The stated purpose of the BC Multiculturalism Act is:

- (a) to recognize that the diversity of British Columbians as regards to race, cultural heritage, religion, ethnicity, ancestry and place of origin is a fundamental characteristic of the society of British Columbia that enriches the lives of all British Columbians;
- (b) to encourage respect for the multicultural heritage of British Columbia;
- (c) to promote racial harmony, cross cultural understanding and respect and the development of a community that is united and at peace with itself;
- (d) to foster the creation of a society in British Columbia in which there are no impediments to the full and free participation of all British Columbians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of British Columbia. (Government of British Columbia, 2004a, Section 2)

The provincial government's framework of practicing multiculturalism in BC is guided as well by the *Agreement for Canada-British Columbia Co-Operation on Immigration* (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004). This agreement ensures that provincial matters related to immigration (such as multiculturalism) are conducted in accordance with the Government of Canada's immigration laws. One of the provincial designations is to:

support the development of a strong and prosperous Canadian economy in which the benefits of immigration are shared across all regions of Canada; and enrich and strengthen the cultural and social fabric of Canadian society, while respecting the federal, bilingual and multicultural character of Canada. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004, Section 1.7)

This task is then delegated to the provincial Settlement and Multiculturalism Division. Their mission statement is to “meet the settlement needs of immigrants and refugees, and promote multiculturalism and anti-racism through leadership and funded initiatives” (Government of British Columbia, n.d., ¶ 4). This division is responsible for BC’s anti-racism, multiculturalism and immigrant/refugee settlement programs. They contract out settlement and adaptation services for new immigrants to third-party service providers, and work with community agencies on anti-racism and multiculturalism initiatives. Some of these programs are the B.C. Settlement and Adaptation Program (BCSAP) and the B.C. Anti-racism and Multiculturalism Program (BCAMP) (Government of British Columbia, n.d.).

In spite of an explicit commitment to immigration, there is a large body of literature that shows the many challenges that immigrant communities face in the province (see Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis’ website: <http://www.riim.metropolis.net>). These challenges range from unemployment and underemployment to poor academic outcomes for children.

The history of Aboriginal communities in British Columbia is one filled of racisms and injustices (Adams, 1975; Armitage, 1993, 1995; Bennett, Blackstock & De La Ronde, 2005; Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005; Gleason, 2002). In Canada, Aboriginal peoples have been segregated in reserves and residential schools; have had their governments, economies, traditions and ceremonies controlled and/or banned by Canadian laws; and, in some cases, have been downright exterminated by racist actions, assumptions and policies (Bennett, Blackstock & De La Ronde, 2005; Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005). Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde state that

The racism experienced by Aboriginal peoples is placed within a unique context of colonization, expropriation of lands and assimilationist policies. Racism is enforced through legal and social instruments developed and implemented by governments and has been perpetrated against several groups in Canada’s history. (p. 7)

The history of the relationship between Canada and Aboriginal peoples has been “marred by social, economic, political and cultural oppression” (Bennett, Blackstock, & De La Ronde, 2005, p. 7). Aboriginal children

have been taken away from their families, first by the residential school system in place from the mid-nineteenth century to 1984 in British Columbia (the last one closed in 1996 in Saskatchewan), then by the child welfare system. To this day, Aboriginal children are grossly overrepresented in the child welfare system across Canada and British Columbia (Armitage, 1993, 1995; Bennett, Blackstock, & De La Ronde, 2005; Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005). In British Columbia, the legacy of colonization is still seen in the amount of control Aboriginal peoples have over their own affairs (Bennett, Blackstock, & De La Ronde, 2005).

Both multiculturalism and Aboriginality are situated in the larger society as contributing to the 'diversity' of the province. Two binaries are created, characteristic of white settler nations (Cohen, 2003): the Anglo settler/non-Anglo migrant binary that multicultural policies seek to resolve, and the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal binary that recognition of Aboriginal peoples' claims to ancestral lands and genocide attempt to address (Cohen, 2003). These debates are located within a larger debate concerning the past, present and future identity of the nation imagined as Anglo-Franco-European in origin—one that ethnic minorities and Aboriginal peoples challenge.

Power/Knowledge and Racisms

The first set of theoretical perspectives employed in this article are characterized by Michel Foucault's work on power and contributions by some of his successors in the field of early childhood (Baker, 1998, 2001; Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Hultqvist, 1998; Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Moss & Petrie, 2002). Foucault (1978) refers to social relations of power/knowledge as a network of discursive relations that move away from simple coercion. Wherever power relations exist, a field of knowledge is constituted. Reciprocally, wherever a field of knowledge exists, power relations are constituted. The effects of discursive power relations involve the formation and regulation of meanings and understandings, disciplining how people act (Popkewitz, 1998).

The second set of theoretical perspectives involves conceptualizations of racisms that depart from liberal modernist discourses of multiculturalism, respect and acceptance (Goldberg, 1993; Razack, 1998). This theoretical perspective pays specific attention to racial normalization:

The underlying point here is that racialized discourse does not consist simply in descriptive representations of other. It includes a set of hypothetical premises about human kinds... and about the differences between them (both mental and physical). It involves a class of ethical

choices... And it incorporates a set of institutional regulations, directions, and pedagogical models. (Goldberg, 1993, p. 47)

Through these perspectives, we also allude to possibilities for resisting racialized discourses and the emergence of alternative antiracist practices (Goldberg, 1993).

Following Miles (1989, as cited in Lee & Lutz, 2005), we refer to the social production of race consciousness by speaking of racialization, “a representational process whereby social significance is attached to certain biological (usually phenotypical) human features, on the basis of which those people possessing those characteristics are designed as a distinct collectivity” (p. 74). Race is not taken as a given, but rather as a social process (Mac Naughton, 2005; Lee & Lutz, 2005; Razack, 1998, 2002). Further, following a transnational feminist framework (Anthias & Lloyd, 2002; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; hooks, 1984; Razack, 2002), racisms are not only understood in relation to ‘race’ but rather as intersecting with other systems of inequality: gender, nationality, class, sexuality, ability, language, and so on (Lee & Lutz, 2005). Lee and Lutz (2005) explain that racism “is a linchpin that sustains a world order built on interlocking systems of gender, heterosexism, white supremacism, ableism, fundamentalisms of all sorts, classism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism” (p. 7). Lee and De Finney (2004) explain that:

Transnationalism focuses on the movements within, between, and across national borders... Transnational feminists dispute the notion of one universal category of identity and instead look at contextual, historical and spatial specifics of identity formation, particularly the role of nationalism and state formation in identity formation. They further acknowledge that forms of domination shift and move as subjects move across borders... (p. 113)

Through the Lenses of an Interpretive *Bricoleur*

This article follows an “interpretative *bricoleur*” (Kaomea, 2000, 2004; Kincheloe, 2001, 2005), “relying on a series of methodological tactics rather than a single, consistent strategy” (Kaomea, 2000, p. 321). At the most general level, it engages with a methodological framework that privileges discursive formation as an analytic tool. Discourse is defined as a “relatively well-bounded area [sic] of social knowledge” that both constrains and enables how we think and talk about a particular social object or practice (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 31). Discourses are not passive bodies of knowledge; neither are they immutable. Rather they assume different forms and trajectories depending on historical circumstances. Discourses function in association with power relations in that

they are both integral to and constitutive of the social relations they describe and in which they are produced (Foucault, 1977, 1978).

At another level, the article is also informed by aspects of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995). Critical discourse analysis is defined as:

A 'three dimensional' framework where the aim is to map three separate forms of analysis onto one another: analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice. (Fairclough, 1995, p. 2)

Critical discourse analysis "foregrounds links between social practice and language, and the systematic investigation of connections between the nature of social processes and properties of language texts" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 96). Fairclough (1995) explains that CDA is a method as much as it is a theory "for studying language in its relation to power and ideology" (p. 1). We asked questions such as: What views of children and families does this text reveal? What tensions can be identified between the different texts and services provided? What conceptual tools do policies design to resolve those tensions? What meta-narratives run through each text? How are those interrelated? How are the voices of racialized minorities positioned in relation to other voices on child development and well being? What issues come up in the text, and what issues are absent? To what values do the texts commit themselves? How do those values emerge in the text? In what order does the material in the text appear? How are the ideas linked? What is the logic of the text? What contradictions are present? (adapted from Boag-Munroe, 2004; Fairclough, 2003; Jarger, 2000).

We are also influenced by the ideas presented in *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies* by Glenda Mac Naughton (2005). We use aspects of "postcolonial theorists' tactics of 'seeking the Otherwise' to extend the tactics and targets of anti-bias/anti-discriminatory education" (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 146). Mac Naughton offers us an array of questions that provide useful in questioning the discourse of whiteness and its power relations. We have found these questions, primarily within the context of early childhood practices, helpful to interrogate and make unfamiliar the documents we reviewed: What power relations have been accomplished through the documents and how do they construct children and families? "Where are the dangers and possibilities for racially just and equitable relationships and understandings...?" How is racialized power circulating through policies and what effects is it having on the possibility for social justice? (adapted from Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 176)

British Columbia Early Childhood Policies

This article is based on the review of documents that outline the goals and objectives guiding the creation and operation of early childhood programs in British Columbia, developed and compiled by the British Columbia Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) on early childhood development in 2004, as well as other key documents that have been created to inform policy development in 2005. The Ministry of Child and Family Development delivers these policies, under its mandate for early childhood development (although this mandate was changed to child care in June 2005).

The documents include presentations, annual reports, papers, briefing notes, speeches, and pamphlets. We concentrated on the discourses that are represented in the documents. In addition to these primary documents, we used empirical and theoretical secondary sources which provided further insights into our analysis. Canada is now engaged in discussions that point to the building of a national system of Early Learning and Child Care (Government of Canada, 2005; Childcare Research and Resource Unit, 2004; Friendly & Beach, 2004). In September of 2005, the provincial government of British Columbia and the federal government of Canada signed a five year agreement on early learning and care. As a result of this agreement, various ministries within British Columbia, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development all share responsibilities for policy development, funding and program delivery. (This agreement was cancelled in January 2006 due to government changes.) The provincial government has provided funding for the development of key initiatives which are purposely aimed at supporting all children using a local community development approach. Initiatives such as Children First; Books for Babies; Ready, Set, Learn; and Success by 6 are unfolding with the intent to have *all* children school ready at kindergarten (Government of British Columbia, 2004b; Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2004a).

A Reading of Discourses of Early Childhood Policies

We report on three discourses. These discourses are in no sense unified, as they present many contradictions and problematics. Following Goldberg's (1993) argument, the discussion that follows "account[s] for the emergence, transformation, and extension, in a word, the (continuing re-) invention" of discourses regarding racialized minorities (p. 8).

(1) *Categories of 'Multiculturalism' and Aboriginal*

The province has created an early childhood development system that is informally divided into three areas (which reflects the rhetoric of larger discourses in the province): early childhood development (ECD) for 'all' (this is what we refer to as the dominant discourse of ECD), Aboriginal ECD (Government of British Columbia, 2004b), and a more loosely defined system that deals with 'multicultural' communities (immigrants, refugees, 'visible minorities') (Ministry of Child and Family Development [MCFD], 1999a, 1999b, n.d.).

We will discuss some of the implications of this artificial division below. In this section, we begin to problematize this categorization. One problem with the construction of these categories is that they collapse and erase complexity and heterogeneity within, across, and amongst these groups and they ignore differences in cultural contexts. The artificiality of these historical and political realities, that keep the debates about Aboriginal and multicultural services apart from the norm, is quickly revealed when juxtaposed against the messiness of lived realities (Lee & Lutz, 2005). For example, some non-white migrants may also be Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa, and Asia (Cohen, 2003). Moreover, after several centuries of colonialism, diasporic settlements, forced and voluntary migration, and mixing among diverse peoples, the myth of 'racial' purity and primordial ethnicity has given rise to the actuality of cultural hybridity, racial 'passing', porous diasporic communities, and mixed ethnic and 'racial' heritages and identities (Cohen, 2003; Hall, 1992).

The other problem is that these categories are created as deviations from the norm. "The dominant Anglo is what provides ... [an] image of the nation, its core values, and ordering structure" (Cohen, 2003, p. 39). The types of divisions that are created shape racialized minorities as the 'others' in need of services that are constructed as different from the 'norm' (the 'norm' being policies and services for white Canadians). What is not questioned are the 'normal' services which do not "show strong signs of de-raciation or de-ethnicization from normative and hegemonic whiteness as cultural identity of citizenship" (Lee & Lutz, 2005, p. 15). As Aboriginal early childhood leaders recognize:

In Canada, Aboriginal early childhood education is gaining recognition as having unique attributes different from those shared by the broader Canadian society. This is a complex phenomenon that on one level, by its very name, recognizes that there is something unique about early childhood education for Aboriginal children compared to that for non-Aboriginal children. Yet, on another level, training programs for early

childhood practitioners, children's curriculum and care practices are anchored, for the most part, in Western theories and assumptions about children's growth and development. (Greenwood & Fraser, 2005, p. 42)

We acknowledge that political distinctions among migrant, indigenous and Anglo-settler collectivities and identities are critical to struggles over resources and power, but these distinctions are harder to discern clearly at the level of everyday life (as our findings from conversations with families from racialized immigrant communities show) (Pacini-Katchabaw, Armstrong de Almeida, & White, 2006).

We need to problematize this artificial division further by looking closely at multiculturalism. State discourses and policies of multiculturalism, for example, are not objective, neutral and equally beneficial to all, but help to constitute hierarchically ordered racialized and gendered categories of citizenship that privilege white male individuals as the ideal citizen subject (Lee & Lutz, 2005). Lee and Lutz (2005) explain that:

Multiculturalism is perceived as a false ideology that disguises racism and exploitation by celebrating ethnicity. From a leftist perspective multiculturalism in Canada is the state's liberal response to racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, in that it attempts to respond to ethnic particularities as a step toward achieving integration into a universal, inclusive national culture. Through multiculturalism as national policy, the state hopes that individuals will feel more secure in their ethnic identities so that they will be more willing to assimilate fully into the national culture. Official multiculturalism assumes that national culture as the existing, normative, national culture of hegemonic whiteness. Liberal multiculturalism does not address racism systematically, because racism is viewed as an individual pathology and not seen as part of the social order. (p. 17)

Foucault's theories of subject formation and the state help to reveal how institutionalized practices and discourses constitute individuals as subjects willing to be governed as different categories of citizens (Ong, 1999). Over time, these categories (e.g., multiculturalism) become internalized and understood as 'natural.' From this perspective, official policies and discourses of multiculturalism, immigration, Aboriginality, and Anglo-Canadian nationalism, for example, can be understood as technologies of subject formation.

(2) The Population Health Model: "All Children"

We referred to the ways in which the system creates a dominant, ideal early childhood development discourse for 'all' children. Within this

dominant discourse of early childhood, children are addressed from a population health model that emphasizes universality with variations that 'deviate' from the norm.

Here are a few examples that reveal the ways in which the population health model is employed:

All children deserve our best efforts to put into practice what we know works best to nurture healthy growth and development. There are some supports that all children need, and others that will only be needed by those children who have a specific need. (MCFD, 2004b, p. 1)

Three British Columbia communities have been selected to demonstrate how the knowledge we have about childhood development can be used in a community plan to support all their children from 0-6 years. (MCFD, 2004b, p. 1)

In the case of the 'Make Children First' initiative, the sub population is children pre-conception to school entry. Working in a population health model means building strategies that address the whole population of children pre-conception to school entry, while they continue to serve the needs of individual children and families with specific needs for intervention or support. (MCFD, 2004b, p. 12)

When a child and his family have an individual need, beyond what *all* [italics added] children need, early intervention and/or support will make a tremendous difference to their healthy development. (MCFD, 2004b, p. 13)

Several issues arise from these statements. First, "what we know works best to nurture healthy growth and development," or "the knowledge we have about childhood development" is not questioned or problematized. The assumption is that child development theories that emphasize universal aspects of development are the best for all children in the province. Several scholars have problematized the universality of child development theories (Bernhard, 1995; Burman, 1994; Mallory & New, 1994; Lubeck, 1996; Polakow, 1989; Walkerdine, 1984). These critiques have shown that universal ideas of childhood silence young children and families from racialized minorities.

Second, it is assumed that the solution is to provide 'more' of these appropriate strategies to those who have needs 'beyond what *all* children need' (often racialized minorities). The inherent assumption and logic of the population health model creates racialized minorities as 'others.' The pathologies are attributed to the racialized minorities themselves but not to the structures in which the population health model is embedded.

Third, the discourse of 'all children' advanced by the population health model assumes colorblindness. Discourses guiding policies "are

moved to overcome the racial differences they tolerate and have been so instrumental in fabricating by diluting them, by bleaching them out through assimilation or integration” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 7). Richard Ford (as cited in Goldberg, 1996) argues that colorblindness provides the image of racial discrimination as “aberrational” in four ways:

One, any legal recognition of race is deemed as anomalous. Racial discrimination is described as an unfortunate historical artefact, which will fade away over time... Two, racism is attributable to the actions of discrete individuals, as opposed to political and social institutions, or to structural splits between groups in conflict. Three, racism and racial conflict are understood as conceptually confined... And four, racism and racial conflict are thought to be spatially anomalous so... racism is conceived as geographically isolated.... (p. 3)

It is important to note that the discourse of colorblindness exists alongside the categorization of multicultural and Aboriginal ECD which imply tolerance and recognition (see findings 1 above). Ford (as cited in Goldberg, 1996) argues that colorblindness and multiculturalism are in fact not opposites, “in that racial concerns are once again quarantined” in multiculturalism (p. 3). In the model of tolerance and recognition, “racial concerns are seen as treasured historical artefacts which must be preserved. Racial identity is located in history more than in the present. Racially specific concerns are those of discrete social groups, not individuals, but again are conceived as opposed to the political institutions or the nation at large. So it is imagined that we can have racial diversity underneath some thin common political culture, which is presumably a cultural or race-neutral” (p. 3). In the case of ECD, racial recognition within the categories of multiculturalism and Aboriginal is “confined to a spatially demarcated autonomous realm” (p. 4). The trouble with these racial areas is that “they may turn out to be empowered cultural enclaves, ... but they may just as easily be impoverished and isolated” categorizations (p. 4).

(3) Culture as a Coherent Unit of Analysis

In relation to the categories of multiculturalism and Aboriginality, discourses that guide policies assume that young children and families affected by those policies are culturally, racially, gender as well as linguistically homogeneous. The discourse of homogeneity positions racialized minority children as incomplete human beings at the beginning of a process of assimilation and, consequently, as having incomplete citizenship status. Furthermore, through homogenization, children and families from racialized minorities are imagined as ‘hard to reach,’ ‘vulnerable,’ ‘at risk.’ Swadener (2000) points that these imaginaries are

part of “the currently popular language for describing those who are *socially excluded* or at risk of failure in various systems or contexts, including education, future employment, and access to ‘the good life,’ or middle-class opportunities” (p. 117). How does British Columbia engage in this rhetoric?

One of the principles for the learning sites is to increase access to services for the ‘hard to reach’ families. (MCFD, 2004a, Slide 14)

In British Columbia, particularly in the Lower Mainland, there are an increasing number of immigrant children for whom English is a second language. Lack of English language proficiency has been shown to be a vulnerability factor for children entering school. (Morley, 2005, p. 5)

A key example of how ‘vulnerability’ is constructed in ECD policies is seen in *Nobody’s Perfect*, a parenting education and support program for parents of children from birth to age five. It is designed to meet the needs of parents who are young, single, socially, geographically or linguistically isolated or who have low income or limited formal education (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003). The program assumes certain vulnerabilities within populations based on language, income, and education. There is an implicit belief that immigrant families or those ‘suffering’ from cultural and linguistic isolation are ‘vulnerable’ and in need of this program. The goals of *Nobody’s Perfect* include: increasing parent’s knowledge and understanding of their children’s health, safety and behaviour; effect positive change in the behaviours of these parents; improve parental confidence and coping skills; and increase self-help and mutual support among parents (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003).

The discourse of homogenization characteristic in British Columbia’s ECD also takes the concept of culture as a coherent unit of analysis. Gender, language and race dynamics are often not acknowledged. When categories such as Aboriginal, immigrant, English as a Second Language are considered, they are often used as categorical identifiers and/or as mediating variables affecting other variables (e.g., ‘normal’ language development, ‘normal’ cognitive development) and not as socially constituted and constituting categories. For example, the second quote above focuses on ‘immigrant’ as a monolithic legal or demographic category and fails to problematize structures of exclusion and marginalization within the dominant society that constitute racialized young children as ‘immigrants.’ The quote also presents the category of ‘immigrant children for whom English is a second language’ as fixed, gender neutral, and monolithic.

Some recent studies on young children of immigrant families have accounted for the role of discourses and social constructs such as ‘race’, class, and immigrant status in issues of language maintenance; language

being a critical resource in forming consciousness of identities (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Armstrong de Almeida, in press). Also useful are recent writings by Mac Naughton (2005) who view identities as active, productive, and ongoing. Such conceptualizations enable us to see the agency of racialized young children in crafting mixed identities within the cultural boundaries of their communities and nation.

Reframing our Thinking of Early Childhood Policies

This article proposes that policies need to be critically examined as they are embedded with normalizing discourses that are often taken for granted. It provides an alternative interpretation to the work that has been conducted in early childhood policy; and moreover to the work that has been done in the area of 'multiculturalism' in early childhood. It helps us to understand that what we consider valuable knowledge might be part of discursive relations.

For change to take place, individuals need to be able to understand how knowledge related to young children and their families, as well as how discourses guiding policies that utilize that knowledge, include racializing discourses. It is important that we begin to question such discourses so we can find alternative ones that move beyond mechanisms of normalization, essentialism and administration when we refer to racialized minorities. Sevenhuijsen (1998) argues that:

Policy texts and legal texts are, after all, 'stories in themselves': they include patterns of dealing with things which are often the result of political compromises and discursive traditions. They often contain fixed patterns of speaking and judging, but they can also open up unexpected discursive spaces, where new forms of thinking and judging can start. (p. 30)

We are now interested in identifying this "unexpected discursive spaces," so that new ways of thinking can emerge.

Following Ford (in Goldberg, 1996), we would like to end by noting that

this is not to critique colorblindness and multiculturalism... It is not to say that the conceptions are no good and should be abandoned... [The] point is that any normative conception of society is subject to abuse. So...we desperately need the philosophical imagination to guide us in these troubled times. (p. 4)

We have already seen the implications of normative conceptualizations, such as 'developmentally appropriate practice,' let's not do it again.

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