

Being, Belonging and Becoming: Some Worldviews of Early Childhood in Contemporary Curricula

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Abstract

Since the last part of the 20th century, early years provision has seen a steady increase with more governments developing policies and allocating funds for the out-of-home care and education of young children. The expansion of early childhood provision and the economic investment made for such provision has gradually led to the introduction of curricula in order to establish the benefits and returns of the provision. Some of the curricula emphasise well-being, belongingness and connectedness with others, community and place; others are outcomes-based developmental models that celebrate individuality, personal achievement and children's becoming.

In this paper, I will explore the philosophical underpinnings of four contemporary curricula to consider the worldviews of early childhood upheld and promoted by them. I will then draw parallels with the Athenian and Spartan educational systems and models in ancient Greece to consider the implications of the worldviews of childhood held in contemporary curricula with regard to the demands and "knowns" of today's society and to the "unknowns" and unforeseeable needs of future generations. Finally, I will conclude with the argument that it is the pedagogy, embraced by early years professionals, which is the mediating force for reconciling different worldviews of early childhood embraced in contemporary curricula.

Introduction

Since the last part of the 20th century, research findings have been increasingly used and cited to support the expansion of early childhood care and education. Indeed, there is now a growing body of evidence which has demonstrated the long term benefits of high quality early childhood services for young children, their families and the wider community (Kilburn and Karoly 2008; Sylva *et al* 2004; Wylie and Thompson 2003; Schweinhart 1994; Schweinhart *et al* 1993). Evidence from neuroscience has also supported these arguments by confirming the importance of early stimulation on brain development (Woodhead 2006; Shonkoff and Phillips 2000).

In addition to this, women's increased employment since the last half of the 20th century has also been a contributory factor for increased early years provision in terms of demand and availability (OECD 2008a); women need, and form the main workforce in, childcare. The Insight Centre for Community Economic Development in the county of Los Angeles in the States, for example, has reported the childcare sector as being comparable to other major industries in the county in terms of revenue (Brown *et al* 2008).

The importance of early childhood provision has been explicitly articulated by the economist and Nobel laureate James Heckman, who argues that the sooner education starts the better.

He claims that early education gives individuals a head start and advantage to both enjoy high earnings and to get into the pathway of lifelong learning (cited in Keeley 2007). These findings and arguments have now been consolidated and become the cornerstone of international policies and commitments for the provision and expansion of early years care and education (OECD 2008a; 2008b; UNICEF 2007; UNESCO 1990; 2000).

The economic arguments about early childhood provision present a worldview of the child as a '*monetary*' unit for which we spend money and we expect, in return, the generation of money in the future. The child has become the subject and object of economic benefits and returns (Keeley 2007). The '*monetarisation*' of the child means that governments now spend more funds than ever before on early childhood care and education to achieve ultimate benefits for children, their families and the wider society. However, governments' accountability for spending tax-payers' money for these services, has also led to the introduction of a range of measures such as the introduction of early years curricula, children's assessment and programme evaluation to safeguard and improve the quality of services and see the returns of the investment.

In the European and Anglo-Saxon educational systems, initial preschool curricula were introduced mainly during the 1980s, providing a conceptual framework for *what* and *how* we teach (Grundy 1987). The work of early pioneers and contemporary thinkers (for example, Montessori, Froebel, Susan Issacs) and in particular Piaget's ideas were influential in the development of the initial early years curricula and the introduction of play-based learning (Moyles 2005; 1989; Smilansky and Shefatya 1990). Gradually, the notion of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP) was introduced to highlight the importance of child-centred and age appropriate practice (Bredekamp 1987).

However, developmentally appropriate curricula and practices faced strong criticisms, firstly, because they assumed universal truths and laws about individuals' development and learning and, secondly, because they ignored the influences of cultural, social and political traditions, powers and systems that are intrinsic to any particular community in any given time (Cannella 2005). As a result, the notion of *Developmentally and Culturally (or Contextually) Appropriate Practice* (DCAP) was introduced to highlight that not only *what and how* we learn is relevant, but also *what and how* we learn is culture-bound and informed and influenced, and often determined by other powerful and dominant groups (Hyun 1998; NAEYC 1996). From this point of view, child's holistic development is understood as being embedded in her/his immediate environment and culture.

Despite the philosophical shift in understanding children's development, the emerging terminology in the field of early childhood (e.g. learning outcomes, school readiness, children at risk, early intervention, benchmarking and best practice -to name a few) implies a universalistic view of the child and imposes standards and norms against which individual children are judged and assessed; they assume quantifiable and measurable certainties applicable to all children (Moss 2008; Cannella 2005;1999) and defy the notion that

children's development is culture and context-bound and so it should be early childhood provision (Dahlberg *et al* 2007).

Conflicting discourses

The arguments, above, demonstrate the complexities and tensions which exist in the field of early childhood care and education. To quote James *et al* (1998), on one hand, is the view of the child as *becoming* or *having*, therefore, early years provision is offered in the name and for the sake of individual and societal economic prosperity and well-being in the future; on the other hand, stands the view of the child as *being*, here and now. The first worldview of the child requires early childhood provision and services which emphasise the skills and competencies required for tomorrow's citizens to earn their living and enjoy the economic prosperity; service provision is made available with future employability as the ultimate goal. The latter sees early years care and education as the fertile ground where the powerful, intrinsically motivated and keen to learn child will flourish and develop holistically and harmoniously to become the competent, autonomous, resilient and well-rounded human being. The first is the focus of politicians, governments and policy makers who like to see identified outcomes, skills and competences to be achieved through a prescribed and technical educational praxis. The latter is primarily embraced by academics and researchers, who focus on and emphasise child-centred, play-based and community-and-culture-embedded learning experiences in the early years.

This may be a crude dichotomy and oversimplification of dominant worldviews of early childhood but it is indicative of the philosophical gap that exists between policy makers, academics and researchers that may leave early years practitioners "lost" between colliding discourses and competing worldviews of the child. I will argue here that the clash between these dominant worldviews of childhood have consequences for both children and the wider society. I will illustrate this argument by providing an overview of the philosophical underpinnings and worldviews of the child reflected in the world-renowned *Reggio Emilia* approach in Northern Italy, the *Te Whāriki* Curriculum in New Zealand/Aotearoa, the English *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) and the *Greek Preschool Curriculum Framework*.

The *Reggio Emilia* approach and the *Te Whāriki* curriculum were chosen because of the wide interest they have attracted by academics and researchers and became well reputed internationally. I had also the opportunity to visit the Reggio Emilia preschools a few years ago and witness and hear first hand their practices. The choice of the *English Early Years Foundation Stage* and the *Greek Preschool Curriculum Framework* was motivated by my familiarity with both of them; I currently live and work in England, but I was initially educated and worked for many years as a nursery teacher in Greece. I had also the opportunity to be involved in the final debate about the Greek Preschool curriculum framework in 2002 (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs/Pedagogical Institute 2002)

The three first curricula approaches and frameworks, above, have been previously discussed by Soler and Miller (2003) in the light of progressive ideals versus instrumental views of the child. In this paper, the four curricula will be discussed at the backdrop of economic

arguments for early years provision in order to examine the worldviews which they uphold about the child and childhood. I will then trace some of the philosophical underpinnings of these curricula and worldviews of the child back in time by referring to the ideals of the Athenian and Spartan educational systems in ancient Greece in order to draw parallels for the long term impact of the underlying principles and ideas of curricula, in general.

Reggio Emilia preschools

The Reggio Emilia preschools were born out of a spirit sparked by the disasters of the Second World War which broke up communities and relationships. The foundation of the preschools affirmed the aspirations of the Reggio Emilia citizens who understood that ‘history can be changed, and is changed by taking possession of it, starting with the destiny of children.’ (Malaguzzi 2000:15). Education was seen as a means of combating the disastrous ideology of fascism through collective efforts, endeavours, achievements and the cultivation of communication, relationships and co-responsibility (Barazzoni 2000).

The Reggio Emilia preschools do not have a curriculum framework which determines *what* children will be taught. The emphasis is placed on pedagogy, that is, *how* children are taught. A pedagogy which values the everyday experience of the child, the teacher and parents within the local community; a pedagogy which reflects the values and commitments of the wider local community and it is rooted in and maintains historical memory; it emphasises identity and place and invests in creativity, imagination and the human capacity for problem solving (Malaguzzi 1998).

The Reggio Emilia pedagogy has emerged through cultural and local appropriation of the work of early pioneers and eminent contemporary theorists and researchers, whilst children’s own voices remain central in its every day application. The Reggio Emilia pedagogy is neither play nor systematic educational instruction; instead, it resembles real-life and offers practice of living (Yyn 2000). It takes the form of long term projects whose emphasis is on intellectual goals which promote positive dispositions, curiosity and problem solving skills, not on prescribed and de-contextualised measurable outcomes (Katz 1999; 1993).

The systematic documentation of children’s endeavours in these projects captures their voices, tells their collective learning story and leads to a product and output (Katz 2008). It documents children’s ‘*hundred languages*’ of expression and representation of their world, which, in turn, is used by early years practitioners for reflection and further action (Malaguzzi 1998). In Reggio Emilia preschools, there is no assessment of individual children or evaluation systems. The success of the programme is judged on the basis of the functioning of the Reggio Emilia community, assuming accountability to the wider society; not - as Solar and Miller (2003) point out - to inspection systems.

The Reggio Emilia preschool philosophy gives early years practitioners the freedom to develop practice by, and from, the grassroots. It equips them with confidence to articulate the principles of their work with an authoritative voice and theorise the wisdom of their profession. It is the practice of a relational pedagogy which emphasises inter-connectedness,

interdependence and self-awareness because of and in relation to others (Papatheodorou 2009; 2006). It is not a measurable outcomes driven pedagogy, because, as Malaguzzi (1998:67) has argued '*What children learn does not follow as an automatic result from what is taught. Rather, it is in large part due to the children's own doings as a consequence of their activities and our resources.*'

To summarise, the Reggio Emilia preschools and their pedagogy present a worldview of the child as *being* and *belonging* within her/his local community as an equal, valued and treasured member. The child's *becoming* is ensured through her/his legitimate peripheral participation in learning through real life projects with which s/he is involved. This is a worldview of the local child, whose *being*, *belonging* and *becoming* are interconnected and sustained by a web of relational structures embodied in practices of the institutions the child attends.

The Te Whāriki curriculum

The *Te Whāriki* early years curriculum was introduced in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 1990s, a time when the country underwent major political, social and economic reforms, and after decades of advocacy embroiled in changes of political priorities (May 2007; Duhn 2006; Carr *et al* 2002). It is the first bicultural curriculum, which has embraced the indigenous perspectives of Maori people, and reflects the negotiated voices of professionals, families and government and their priorities and interests. It has embraced both local perspectives and international trends and imperatives (May 2007; Duhn 2006; Soler and Miller 2003; Carr *et al* 2002; Carr and May 2000).

The aims and aspirations of the curriculum for children are "To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society." (Ministry of Education 1996b: 9, cited in Peters 2009). Its four broad principles, that is, empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships are linked with children's well being, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration to reflect our inter-dependence as human beings (Peters 2008; May and Podmore 2000).

The Te Whāriki curriculum provides a flexible and non-prescriptive structure that emphasises both context and processes and allows teachers the flexibility to "weave" their own curriculum pattern by taking into account the perspectives of children, their families, and their centre and its community (May 2007). This is best pursued through *Learning Stories* which document children's learning dispositions, and associated behaviours and actions. *Learning Stories* capture children's learning progress and enable teachers to reflect on their pedagogy and provide feedback to the child. The sharing of *Learning Stories* with children and their family also enables the development of relationships between children, their families and their teachers (Peters 2009; Carr 2001).

However, in contrast to collective documentation of children's endeavours and pursuits in Reggio Emilia preschools, the *Learning Stories* in the Te Whāriki curriculum focus on

individual children; they document and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reinforcing personal dispositions and patterns of learning, for instance curiosity, trust and playfulness, perseverance, confidence and responsibility (Peters 2009; Carr 2001). They reflect, as Duhn (2006) would argue, a shift from collective responsibility to individual autonomy, stability, security and self-reliance exercised within their community and cultural context.

The Te Whāriki curriculum reflects a worldview of the child as both *becoming* and *being* the citizen of today and tomorrow, whilst it ensures her/his *belonging* to both local and global cultures. A citizen, who is deeply connected with her/his roots and culture and has a sense of identity, belongingness and connectedness. It aspires for children to maintain their roots and identity with their place and culture and, at the same time, to become world citizens by being autonomous and self-reliant, able to function outside their local community. In Duhn's (2006) words:

‘This is the global/local child... who wings his or her way across and through obstacles in multiple environments while feeling grounded in his or her sense of belonging as long as he or she is part of a community.’ (p.199)

... [who] will have ‘wings’ to participate globally, and ‘roots’ to sustain his or her sense of self.’ (p. 200)

The English Early Years Foundation Stage

In the UK, the first curriculum was introduced in 1996, known as *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education* (SCAA 1996), implemented in England and Wales. This was reviewed to become *Early Learning Goals* (QCA 1999) which, in England, was replaced in 2000 by the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA 2000). The latter was followed by an assessment framework, *The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile* (DfES/QCA 2003), to enable practitioners to chart children's progress against identified learning outcomes. The Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance was review in 2007 and it incorporated the *Birth to Three Matters* (DfES 2002) document to produce the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (DfES 2007a) whose implementation started in 2008. This is a legislative framework for all children, from birth to five years old, attending early years education and care settings in England (The other three constituent nations in the UK have their own curricula frameworks).

The current EYFS curriculum, as it was the case with its predecessor, is an outcomes and play-based curriculum largely influenced by developmental perspectives. It is a prescriptive document underpinned by four principles, that is, uniqueness and competency of the child from birth; positive, loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person; enabling environments which support and extend the child's development and learning; and recognition that development and learning are different for each child and takes place at different rates, but they are closely interconnected (DfES 2007a).

There are 69 early learning goals organised across six areas, that is, personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; problem solving, reasoning and numeracy; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development. The EYFS is also accompanied by the *Practice Guidance* document which provides advice and detailed information on how practitioners can support children's learning and development and it mandates the assessment of children's outcomes in 9-point scale across 13 areas related to early learning goals (DfES 2007a; DfES 2007b).

The EYFS curriculum is largely influenced by developmental perspectives, acknowledging the diverse cultural influences in the country. It emphasises children's holistic development and attempts to embrace explicitly care, welfare and education. It clearly articulates the early learning goals, how to be achieved and assessed. Although it is underpinned by the pedagogy of play, the recommended *Practice Guidance* (2007b) engenders a technocratic interpretation and implementation, discouraging deviation and stifling creativity and innovation. These concerns are also echoed in Pugh' (2010:10) observation that the noble objective to "narrow the gap" in children's outcomes may have unintended consequences in creating pressures and skewing practice to meet goals that are not all appropriate for all children. Earlier on, Kwon (2002) had already warned us that the pressures of children's assessment, inspections and programme evaluation had reinforced formal instruction, especially in literacy and numeracy, in order to demonstrate measurable curricula learning outcomes (Kwon 2002).

In contrast to long term advocacy and negotiated voices of many stakeholders and interested parties which led to the introduction of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, the EYFS was a top down governmental initiative, supported based on expert advice and wide consultation. Yet, concerns have been voiced by some academics, researchers, and parents, especially with regard to the contribution of the EYFS to children's early "schoolification" (OPEN EYE 2008). The House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee (2009) has also expressed concerns about certain early learning goals, especially those related to literacy, and the level of detail and prescription of the *Practice Guidance* document, and it has recommended their revision in the forthcoming review of the EYFS in 2010.

During the same period of repeated revisions of the early years curriculum, the government systematically expanded childcare provision in England (for example, with the introduction of the Sure Start programme and Children's Centres) and it raised expectations to improve the quality and standards in education with the introduction, for example, of *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003) and the *Integrated Qualifications Framework* (CWDC 2010). Such governmental investment gradually led to heavy regulation of the sector through children's assessment, OFSTED (Office of Standards in Education) inspections, large scale programme evaluations as well as the early years settings' own self-evaluation.

However, evaluation of programmes such as Sure Start (a flagship initiative of the previous government) has also shown that early years provision has not yet produced the proclaimed long term intended outcomes for children and their families, although there is a trend of improvement (National Audit Office 2009; DfES 2008; DfES 2005). There are, today, as

many as 20 per cent of children who do not achieve their full potential and the expected outcomes for education and well-being, and health falls behind their peers (Pugh 2010). Although these findings do not refer directly to the evaluation of the English early years curriculum (in its different versions), they are indicative of the fact that what we set out to measure in the short term may not really yield the desirable outcomes in the long run.

To summarise, the EYFS curriculum envisions the child primarily as *becoming* the autonomous, self-reliant, productive and responsible citizen of tomorrow and projects a utilitarian worldview of the child. Through a prescriptive curriculum the child is helped to reach her/his potential and to achieve the skills required for her/his own future economic prosperity and for making a positive contribution to the wider society. The child's *becoming* as the future productive citizen takes precedence to the child's (*well*) *being* and *belonging*.

The Greek Preschool Curriculum

In Greece, the first preschool curriculum was introduced in 1989, as the final step of a series of measures taken, under the pressure of teachers' union, to professionalise the sector¹. The curriculum aimed to support the holistic and balanced development of young children by pursuing learning outcomes organised around five areas of development, that is, psycho-kinaesthetic development; socio-emotional, moral and religious development; aesthetic development; cognitive development; and development of motor skills and intellectual competencies. Teachers were advised to organise the daily programme around children's self-initiated activities and their own pre-organised activities, elicited from children's own interests and experiences in their families and the community. The early years teachers were seen as facilitators of children's engagement with learning and as evaluators of their educational practice (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs 1989:1). This was a brief document informed mainly by the children's perceived developmental needs and its pedagogy was much influenced by the dominant, at the time, Piagetian notions of exploration and investigation.

With the introduction of the preschool curriculum, the notion of learning outcomes was established, but the concept of evaluation remained an unknown construct in the Greek preschools and, in fact, it was never materialised. The profession remained largely free to exercise its own judgement for the outcomes of their work; there were no assessments of children or inspection systems; the early years advisors had a purely consultative role.

Thirteen years after the introduction of the preschool curriculum, the early years professionals had developed two parallel processes in their practice; they addressed the learning outcomes through playful and carefully structured and sequenced tasks and activities, and they allowed time for children to enjoy play for its own sake without the interference of adults (Papatheodorou 2003). Free from evaluation and inspection systems, it

¹ By mid 1980s, the profession had already achieved equal pay awards and graduate status with teachers in other phases of education and the introduction of the curriculum came as a confirmation and acknowledgement of the professional status of the nursery school teachers and childcare practitioners.

appears that the early years practitioners were able to accommodate different philosophical principles in their practice; they used structured and de-contextualised activities to address the outcomes-based curriculum and allowed space for play to accommodate a developmentally appropriate pedagogy.

In the 2000s, the preschool curriculum was reviewed as part of the Education 2000 Reform. The resultant curriculum has reaffirmed the aims of the initial curriculum and acknowledged the role of preschool as a preparatory stage for formal education. Its content, much influenced by the English Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000), includes specific learning outcomes across the areas of children's development identified in the initial curriculum, but subject areas such as maths, knowledge and understanding of the world (e.g. history, geography, religion), creativity and ICT were more explicitly articulated (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs & Pedagogical Institute 2001).

At the same time, the revised curriculum has attempted to harmonise the prescriptive learning outcomes and subject-oriented curriculum with the introduction of a pedagogy based on interdisciplinary (*διεπιστημονικότητα*) and cross-thematic (*διαθεματική*) integration (*ενιαιοποίηση*). The introduced pedagogy embraced the principles of socio-cultural theories and attempted to emulate the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia by re-affirming the importance of children's own "lived" experience (*βιωματική*) in the learning process (Rapti 2005; Matsaggouras 2002; Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs & Pedagogical Institute 2001). The notion of children's assessment was also embraced in the form of Children's Sketchbooks (*Σχέδια Εργασίας*), devised to document children's learning journey (Pikrodimitri 2004; 2002).

As it is the case with the EYFS, the Greek preschool curriculum was a top down governmental initiative. Teachers' trade union however remained influential in maintaining professional autonomy by avoiding the external evaluation of their educational practice. The resultant preschool curriculum embraced international trends, which were appropriated and accommodated to fit an educational system whose organisation and administration remain highly centralised and largely ethnocentric (Kouloumbaritsi *et al* 2007).

As yet, there is little research or national evaluation of the impact of preschool education in the Greek context. Once again, formal external evaluation of the preschool provision was mentioned but not built-in in the Education 2000 reform, reflecting the strong position and opposition of the profession to external monitoring and control of their work. As it is the case in the Reggio Emilia preschools – the outcomes of preschool education are judged mainly on the basis of unspoken and shared societal expectations about children's readiness for the primary school. Academic and intellectual goals remain the focus of preschool education, reflecting a deep-seated and strongly-held societal appreciation of education and its long term effects; to be "*μορφωμένος*" (educated) is the ultimate honourable achievement.

Despite its borrowing and influences from international trends, the resultant Greek preschool curriculum framework provides a framework which demonstrates an Ulyssian spirit, in the

sense that such trends and influences have been considered and appropriated to fit the country's long educational and ideological history and to maintain the autonomy of the profession to be the judge of its educational praxis.

To summarise, in terms of its espoused learning outcomes and content the Greek preschool curriculum reflects a worldview of the child as *becoming*; academic and intellectual goals remain the focus of preschool education, aiming to prepare children for formal education. In terms of its pedagogy, the curriculum subtly acknowledges the child's *being* and *belonging* by embracing her/his "lived" experience within family and the community.

Worldviews of childhood in early years curricula

The brief analysis of the four curricula reflects a world view of the child in the continuum of *being*, *belonging* and *becoming*. However, the degree of emphasis placed and priority given in each of these parameters differs for each curricula model. On one side of the continuum stands the Reggio Emilia approach with its open-ended learning outcomes and a pedagogy that is creative, flexible and responsive to children; it is informed by and informs the community life; a pedagogical praxis which is rooted in children's *belonging* and *being* in the local community; children are viewed and valued as equal member of the community.

On the other side of the spectrum stands the English EYFS with its well-defined learning outcomes and exemplification of good practice, striving for the individual's *becoming* through monitoring achievement and performance, whilst it also acknowledges the child's *being* and *belonging*. 'What' the curriculum wants to achieve and 'how' to achieve and assess it are explicitly articulated and well prescribed (QCA 2008; DFES 2007a & 2007b). Such prescription, however, may undermine early years practitioners' confidence to deviate from *good practice* in achieving the 'whats' and implementing the 'hows' and may endanger reflectivity, flexibility and responsiveness for contextually appropriate praxis. Potentially, the missing link in the EYFS is the lack of early years practitioners' flexibility and ownership of the pedagogical praxis.

The *Te Whāriki* Curriculum and the *Greek Preschool Curricula framework* attempt to balance tantalising opposing forces such as open-ended learning outcomes and community belongingness for the first, and subject specific outcomes and academic achievement for the latter; they strive to preserve the old and embrace the new. Both curricula invest in open and experiential pedagogies that invest in children's "lived" experience, but they differ too. The *Te Whāriki* curriculum is outwards looking, by investing in the skills and competences for the future global citizen, whilst emphasising local connectedness (Duhn 2006). The *Greek Preschool Curriculum Framework* remains inwards looking, by emphasising individual academic achievement and preparing the country's future citizen through cultural appropriation of global trends. In the vernacular, both curricula 'think global, but act local.'

The Athenian and Spartan education

These contrasting worldviews of childhood, mirrored in the four curricula, bring to my mind the Athenian and Spartan educational models in ancient Greece. I recall from my education

as a young student that both systems aimed to produce the “good” citizen, but the means of achieving this aim and how the good citizen was understood was different. For the Athenian model, education aimed to produce the *good* and *beautiful* citizen (*καλόν καγαθόν πολίτην*) who showed *healthy mind in a healthy body* (*νοῦς υγιής εν σώματι υγιής*) - qualities embraced in the *Te Whāriki* curriculum and still form fundamental principles of Greek education. It was a model of education that indulged *imagination through arts, music* and *philosophising* (*φιλοσοφείν*) to develop free thinking citizens, obliged and committed to participate in public life (*δήμος*) – the underlying principles of democracy.

The Athenian educational model started from, and emphasised *self awareness* (*γνώθι σ'εαυτόν*) and used the Socratic *dialogic inquiry* (*μαιευτική*) method of learning which was based on the notion of *ignorance* (*ἀγνοια*), reflected in the expression *one thing I know, I know nothing* (*ἐν οἶδα ὅτι οὐδέν οἶδα*), in order to emphasise the importance of questioning and having open mind to old and new ideas. It gave children time (*καιρός*) to play and express their aptitudes and cultivate their dispositions, because as Plato argued *play is children's job* (*Τα παιδεία παίζει*). For the Athenians, the children were the future bearers of their culture and civilization (Lascarides and Hinitz 2000).

The Spartan model, on the other hand, was austere and technocratic, aiming to prepare the good citizen who would become the brave soldier to defend her/his city-state, not ever to show cowardice. When leaving for war, the Spartan mother would give the shield to her son saying *with it or on it* (*ἢ ταν ἢ ἐπί τας*), meaning that either you bring it home or you come dead on it. Expression of opinion was measured, reflected in the saying *few words are wise words* (*το λακωνίζειν ἐστίν φιλοσοφείν*) to demonstrate the importance of having the ability to constrain and suspend rushed judgements and their expression.

From a very young age, both boys and girls were educated by the city-state, following a regimented programme of exercise to reach self-obedience, control and self-reliance. They followed a strict diet that included a special kind of nutritious soup (*μέλαν ζωμός*) – similar dietary ideas are currently indulged by policy makers. Young children with disabilities had no place in Sparta; at birth they would be dropped from the edge of the infamous cliff of Kaiada (*Καιάδα*).

The aim of both the Athenian and Spartan educational models was the child's *becoming* and, at their time and place, both models were successful. In the short term, both Athenians and Spartans produced the good citizen, although differently understood and interpreted. For the Athenians the good citizen was involved with and contributed to public life to institute the notion of democracy; for the Spartans the good citizen was the obedient defender of the city-state (although Athenians did the same when the occasion arose). To a large extent the success of both systems is due to consistency between their worldview of childhood and their pedagogical ideals and practices.

However, it was the Athenian views of childhood, educational ideals and pedagogy that saw the growth of great philosophers whose thinking and work formed the basis of western

civilisation and saw the rise of democracy. The Athenian worldview of the child and its respective pedagogy demonstrate that beyond and above a consistent and unifying worldview of childhood and pedagogical praxis, it is the kind of pedagogy that is of more importance than anything else. A technocratic and technical pedagogy may respond to a utilitarian view of the child and serve well the current 'knowns', but it is the creative, experiential and ontological pedagogy of the Athenians that had diachronical relevance and influenced the 'unknowns' of an unpredictable future. It is the Athenian educational model and its pedagogy that aspired for *excellence* (*αριστεία*) and strived for *democracy* (*δημοκρατία*), aiming for high achievements and equity. These aspirations are as relevant and valued today as it was then. However today, as it was then, the notions of excellence for all and equity present challenges and have inherent tensions and conflicts. The pertinent question for the 21st century is - as it was in classic Greece - how do we achieve excellence and equity.

The mediating role of pedagogy in conflicting worldviews

Today, outcomes-based curricula and assessment and evaluation systems are conceived as vehicle of offering a level playing field and equal opportunity in education for all. However, they potentially endanger educational excellence, especially, if the identified expected outcomes are interpreted as *the* outcomes to be achieved and the suggested good practice is seen as *the* best practice *for all*.

Evidently, from a philosophical point of view, curricula which are most appreciated for their outcomes for children and communities are those which are underpinned by a pedagogy which reflects and it is informed by the dominant worldviews of childhood in a particular society; a pedagogy that is *ensternised*² by the early years practitioners and allows them freedom to negotiate personal and professional knowledge and wisdom and accommodate competing imperatives; it takes an ontological rather than utilitarian stance towards childhood; it invests in the individual as being the most indispensable resource available, not for what s/he will become but for both what s/he is and will become. A pedagogy which - to recall the words of T.S. Eliot (1934)³ - believes that human wisdom is more and beyond information and knowledge; a pedagogy which invests in the individual's capacity and dispositions to experiment and find relationships, be it social or cognitive, and make connections between actions and ideas to transform themselves and create knowledge.

Even if we shift from philosophical arguments to empirical evidence it appears that what we measure in the short term does not really generate the desirable outcomes in the long run. This raises the question whether a test-dominated and market-based education system is the best way to achieve a world-class education (Mortimer 2008). It seems that the 'quantified', 'measured', 'weighted' and 'monetarised' child has not produced the desirable outcomes.

² From the Greek word 'ευστερνίζομαι', meaning I embrace something with my soul and heart.

³ Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

Concluding remarks

To conclude, the brief analysis of the four early years curricula shows that there are different worldviews of early childhood, representing the broad spectrum of *being, belonging and becoming*. On one hand, there is the child who is viewed as an independent and autonomous agent and, at the same time, part of his/her immediate culture and community; the child whose *being* and *belonging* are more important than her/his *becoming*. There is an inherent philosophical assumption that by securing children's *being* and *belonging*, their *becoming* will be achieved in time. Thus, early childhood care and education is seen as a facilitative process in the child's journey of life.

On the other hand, there is the child who is conceived as monetary unit; the future well-trained and skilled adult who will multiply the returns of the investments made for his/her early childhood care and education. Accordingly, early childhood care and education are seen as the compensatory process for the child to reach her/his potential and achieve readiness for learning.

Evidently, the open-ended curricula which invest in an enabling and creative pedagogy are much appreciated for their contribution to children's positive dispositions to learning and to life. It is the outcomes-based, informed by a prescribed pedagogy, whose impact remains questionable. The latter also present a challenge for early years practitioners who are caught between two conflicting worldviews and discourses of childhood, unable to negotiate or negate these conflicting views in order to nurture the powerful child and, at the same time, to demonstrate short-term measurable outcomes.

The early years professionals may not be able to change curricula and evaluation systems, but they can embrace a pedagogy that sets out for children standards of lived experience, not standards for short-term measurable outcomes (Katz 2008). They can exercise a pedagogy that is rooted in children's experience of life and for life; not chosen for their utility for the current 'knowns', but for their potential and responsiveness to the 'unknowns' of tomorrow. They need to (and can) invest in the pedagogy as the mediating force between conflicting worldviews of childhood that exist in curricula; because it is an articulated pedagogy that will negotiate and promote excellence and equality for all and every individual child by attending to their being, belonging and becoming.

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