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Holding firm the bonds of convention:
Child Study, Primary English Teaching and the Competencies Debate

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Will the bonds of convention hold firm without some foundation in
nature?
(Rousseau, Emile)

Abstract

In this paper I examine the ways in which the history of Child Study
has produced the 'literate' child 'framed' as 'standard' by National
Curriculum and the Victorian Curriculum Standards and Framework in

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English. I briefly review the discourse of Child Study, from the invention of childhood in the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century Romantic presentation of the child as a 'naturally' pure and innocent 'blank slate', and progressing through an increasingly scientific, objective and objectifying process of studying the child as an entity to be measured and quantified, in terms of body and mind. I discuss how Child Study has served (and in its contemporary manifestations continues to serve) a dual purpose in education. First, Child Study assists the state to fit 'the child' to the developing project of mass education. Second, it informs the fit of a standardised mass education system around its product: a 'normal' 'standard' of physical and intellectual development, and 'natural' ability. I want to demonstrate that there is nothing 'natural' about normality, and that there are significant limitations and inequities implicated in an uncritical acceptance of normative views of 'the child'. My interest here is to illuminate the psychological construction of the figure of the child as it is concealed (and congealed) within contemporary assumptions and statements and practices about teaching and learning literacy, in curriculum outcomes statements, and thus in statements about teacher competency.

Introduction

The upper-class family of eighteenth-century England seems to have concentrated on three branches of teaching and beyond these to have been remarkably negligent in training the young. With quite ruthless efficiency young children were taught to read, to endure pain and to prepare for their probable early death. Considerable thought and effort were given to this teaching.

Mrs Wesley's methods of teaching her children to read are perhaps most widely known. [...] When one of the Wesley children reached the age of five, a day was set aside to teach it to read. All in turn began their lesson at nine in the morning; by five o'clock they knew their letters, 'except Molly and Nancy, who were a day and a half before they knew them perfectly', for which their mother thought them very dull. On the following day the child was ready to tackle the first chapter of Genesis (Musgrave, 1966: 26, citing R. Southey, The Life of Wesley, 1820).

Almost a hundred and eighty years after Molly and Nancy's failure to learn to read as quickly as the other Wesley children damned them to historical ridicule, even the 'dullest' of children is given more of an opportunity to learn to read than that provided by the impatient Mrs Wesley. And although there are many twentieth century children of whom their teachers might form similar opinions, most who are given the opportunity to learn to read and write, do. It is certainly not normal to find illiterate children in Australia, or in any of the countries of

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the first world (UNICEF, 1990). Literacy is seen as a universally desirable good, and indeed, as UNICEF moves towards the goal of universal literacy for all children in all the worlds of the planet, there is renewed interest in literacy learning in Australia, as elsewhere in the first world. Government and public interests are increasingly concerned to measure the amount of literacy Australian children have, and (in the interests of retaining competitive economic advantages in the future) to improve this amount as much as we can (ACTU, 1987; DEET, 1990).

For these reasons, teacher education for literacy has recently begun to attract a considerable amount of media, governmental and professional attention. The quality of teacher education, it seems, is a means both of explaining why literacy standards are considered to be 'falling' in Australia, and, simultaneously, as a means of remedying this problem (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1993). Even more recently, with the national focus on standardised testing of literacy levels in the third and fifth year of schooling, and calls for this testing to be extended to children in their first year of school (Kemp, 1996), the focus of attention for literacy education has fallen squarely on the junior primary teacher.

Learning how to approach the teaching of English language and literacy is a centrally important aspect of primary teaching in Australia, as elsewhere in the English-speaking world. This has clearly been the

case for centuries, ever since the invention of 'childhood', which is now widely accepted to have occurred in the sixteenth century (Ariès, 1962). In the Wesley family's schoolroom, the content and practice of literacy curriculum was central to the achievement of all other educational aims, including pain endurance and early-death preparation, as well as access to Scripture. The importance of good literature and good models in the shaping of young minds and bodies towards particular, desirable ends, is intrinsic to the social project of educating the 'child', a social subject which itself may well have been closely related to the invention of printing, and the resulting growth in reading:

While the various studies of childhood point to many fluctuations of attitudes toward children across time, country, class, and religion, one relatively consistent theme that emerges is that of a major shift in attitudes towards children beginning in some classes in the sixteenth century - the same century in which literacy and printing in the vernacular spread through Western Europe. Before that time little special attention was paid to children. From the sixteenth to the twentieth century, however, children were increasingly isolated from adult society and perceived as a special group requiring particular care, protection, and isolation (Meyrowitz, 1985).

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Comenius wrote in the sixteenth century that `education conducted without blows, rigour or compulsion, as gently and pleasantly as possible and in the most natural manner' is the most effective and successful education of all (Rusk, 1948:93). His assumption that there was no necessary importance to be placed on the nature of the teacher seems to have been shared by Mrs Wesley, I suspect. For Comenius, `[t]he art of teaching demands nothing more than the skilful arrangement of time, of the subjects to be taught and of the method' (Rusk, 1948: 94).

[T]o do what we see others do, to go where others go, to follow those who are ahead of us, and to keep in front of those who are behind us is the course of action to which we are all most naturally inclined (Comenius, cited in Rusk, 1948:93).

Those slower children who seem to lose their places in this 'natural' procession, and fall behind when all other circumstances are assumed to be equal, must, like poor Molly and Nancy, somehow be ‘less' than the others -- ‘naturally'. If the teacher is provided, and provides her charges, with sound, structured materials from which they may learn, then learning must occur, unless there is some deficiency in the child itself. Even our most sophisticated present day attempts to find out which of our children are (perhaps secret, or partial) Mollies or Nancies, similarly, and still, fail to move beyond the thinking of Comenius. Tests and frameworks of literacy achievement place the burden of responsibility or blame for the literacy deficiency of the population on the ‘natural' deficiencies of particular groups of children or their families, or on the particular methods utilised for literacy instruction.

This quite clearly indicates an ambiguity in the nature of the responsibility of and onus on the teacher for student learning. When Steedman (1992a:179) notes Froebel's claim that the ideal teacher of young children is like "a mother made conscious", she highlights an alternative view from that outlined above, and one which positions the figure of the nurturing teacher/mother as central to any comprehensive account of social and literacy development in childhood, both in school as well as at home. The prevalence and strength of this sort of oppositional discourse further complicates the ambiguous position of

the teacher, so that it is no wonder, I argue, that teacher education for literacy is, and has been, ‘in crisis' on several counts in the recent past. Steedman (1992a: 179) stresses the importance of acknowledging "the development within primary schooling of certain sets of ideas that have linked the teaching of young children with an understanding of mothering, and the contradictions that this largely inexplicit and unexamined notion spells out for women and children in classrooms, particularly working class children and their teachers."

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Competing approaches to literacy education are receiving considerable rehearsal and attention in media and professional debates over literacy, as the state and society struggle to cope with the present social and educational 'crisis' of techno-cultural change (Green et al., 1994, 1997). At the same time there is pressure for schools to satisfy state demands for particular student outcomes and clientele, as well as competing for market share of students by offering expanded curriculum. This has been cited as a reason for decreased attention to literacy instruction in the primary curriculum, and perhaps as a reason for public concern about the decreasing literacy standards implied by such a statement. That standards do not, in fact, appear to be falling at all (The Advertiser, November 13, 1996: 2) may be seen as rather inconvenient for this line of argument, of course, but in no way seems to have lessened its impact. The media and the policy makers are demanding that something be done to address the problem of student literacy standards as a means of helping society to cope with change, as social power shifts and struggles for settlement in the new era of electronic information.

Yet it is only the nature of this change that is new. As Green, Hodgens and Luke (1994, 1997) have shown, the most recent public crises in literacy in Australia have arisen in the school system as an effect of social systems attempting to deal with unpredictable changes in youth culture. Especially since the massive expansion of the secondary school system in the 1960's (to contain adolescent babies of the ‘boom'), there has been a recycling of public attention onto the perception of falling standards in education, and a call for a rigorous and objective 'return' to the higher standards of previous times. But as Threthewey (1995) notes:

the years around 1900 were also crucial since this is when the first major reassessment and restructuring of public elementary school systems began to take shape. The imposition and extension of full-time compulsory attendance and the provision of secondary schools during this period [...] comprised a key means by which a perceived 'crisis of youth' was dealt with. (Trethewey, 1995: 47 [referring to the work of Miller and Davey, 1990])

The child-centred approaches favoured in contemporary curriculum and competency discourse derived from the Romantic view of the child as innocent, pure, and thus morally fragile -- easily corruptible if not nurtured in an appropriate fashion. They are also the forerunners of the emphasis on psychology integral to the 'New Education' in Australia. The moral social project of schooling (Hunter, 1989, 1994; Luke, 1989) can be seen as developing, historically, along with the invention of childhood (Jenks, 1996), the feminisation of the teaching profession (Steedman, 1992b, Apple, 1986), printing (Luke, 1989), and the influential role of interest in more formalised and objective 'Child Study' in shaping much of twentieth-century educational thinking.

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The importance of history for literacy teacher education

As a teacher education worker, I consider that both pre-service and in-service education should by definition be sites of teacher learning, and that the process of teacher education can therefore be understood as a process of change, in and of the profession. To this end, there is considerable value and need, I argue, to contextualise all teacher education for literacy within an historical framework which acknowledges the complexities and lack of settlement about what literacy is, and what primary English teaching is, and how they should be understood. Too often, new teachers begin with knowledge of a particular 'method' for approaching the teaching of literacy in their classrooms -- as 'Truth' -- but with no way to situate this in relation to the embodied knowledges of other, older (and perhaps contradictory) 'methods' they have learnt in the classrooms of their own childhoods. Nor is the historical discourse of English teaching and literacy education available to them.

In what follows, I will investigate the traces that primary English today bears of its own genealogical history -- traces that have often been obliterated by the slate rags, inkblots, thumbprints, plastic erasers, white-out and (lately) the delete keys of classroom literacy practices. I want the reader to understand more about why English curriculum at this time is the way it is, and that this is the result of history, and is thus itself susceptible of change, rather than being 'cast in stone'. To illustrate this, an account of the learning that occurred in one of the very first literacy lessons of a group of children just beginning their first year at school will be briefly discussed. This work allows us to see how many children in school are (and are seen as needing to be) reconstituted within strict bounds of 'normality' by explicit work directed toward this purpose by teachers, before they can learn to be literate (Luke, 1995).

Teachers are faced with an historical legacy of a range of diverse and often incommensurable knowledges about children and 'the child', which are often (dis)embodied, incoherent and unconscious. These knowledges, gleaned from our own histories of being in classrooms as children ourselves, link us in practice to the practices of the past, in ways which often contradict and counteract rational, theoretical views of the child developed from both Romantic and psychological efforts in 'child study', and in the present, commonly-accepted standard or 'norm' of teachers' work as it is represented in the National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching (NPQTL, 1996). The point here is that it is this work that has traditionally been seen as 'women's work' (Apple, 1986, Steedman, 1992a), although, as Steedman (1992b: 615) argues, this is "an actual historical process that is inexplicable without some knowledge of the history of women and children in European

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society, but that never, ever mentions women and children". Comenius' ‘most natural manner' is that of the mother/teacher, Rousseau's ‘foundation in nature' is that of the cultured mother, and the 'natural' child subject of schooling is a male child -- Emile, in fact and in effect.

Focussing attention here on the earliest interactions of the child in school forces a recognition of the problems and ambiguities of the child/study issue. It also forces a recognition of the importance of ensuring that teacher education does its own work to make sure that new teachers have an explicit sense of the position in which they are placed as teachers entering the profession at (this) particular point in historical time. There is a danger remaining in much pre-service teacher education that teachers continue to undergo a process of 'training' rather than 'education', in the sense elaborated by Marginson (1992). Although he is speaking with reference to the competency movement in vocational schooling and industry training, and

prior to the publication of the National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching (NPQTL, 1996), Marginson notes the view that competency assessment can be extended to higher education with concern, and reminds us that such proposals do not "take into account certain generic competencies that have been identified with higher education, including the ability to manipulate a complex body of knowledge, to understand knowledge as relative, and to create new knowledge" (Marginson, 1992: 162).

Since the abolition of the binary system in Higher Education, and the requirement for all teaching graduates to have a degree, there have been many attempts to increase the general as well as the vocational 'education' of new primary teachers. But this has been a slow process, with preparation tending to be framed by the competency statements and the state versions of National Curriculum. Indeed as Green and Beavis (1996) note, with reference to a recommendation in the Christie Report (1991) for "all teacher training programs in secondary English" to include a study of the "history and current construction of the discipline" and "an analysis of the different models of teaching of English found in both the history and the contemporary curriculum documents" (Christie et al., 1991: 153), there is no mention of any need for primary teachers to be similarly informed.

The unfortunate implication is that primary English teaching has effectively no history to speak of, or perhaps nothing worth worrying about -- a rather telling omission (Green and Beavis, 1996: 3).

As I have noted above, primary English is at present a contested site (Richardson, 1994; Kamler and Comber, 1996), and primary teachers are quite clearly 'caught' between the LAP and the CSF, between media condemnation of dominant professional-theoretical positions on literacy

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learning and calls for a 'return' to the teaching of grammar and skills (The Age Education Section, November 19, 1996). These contemporary debates have their origins and roots in the history and settlements about what English 'is' and how it should be taught, and are best engaged by being understood in historical context, as a tension between Romantic and positivistic traditions of 'the child' in relation to language and literacy curriculum.

However, although attention must be given to 'what counts as English', and in the ways it has changed (and also remained steady and constant) over time, English teaching can also be viewed as an exemplary instance of education more generally. Recent work investigating the history of English teaching, programming and literacy debates (Green, Luke and Hodgens, 1994, 1997; Cormack and Comber, 1996; Reid, 1996), for instance, indicates the foundational status of 'child study', as framing the disciplining context of language and literacy study in primary English, with its ‘feminised' nature and its unspoken reliance on the work of women to form particular sorts of literate children.

Studying the child

As a genealogical study, this work is based on a review of professional and specialist writings on child study, ranging from the Romantic view of the child as portrayed in Rousseau and Wordsworth, through versions of progressive discourses which can be discerned in the work of Piaget, Montessori, Steiner, Dewey, Bruner and Vygotsky. As Steedman (1992) notes:

The child as potential rescuer, or reclaimer, of corrupt adulthood, was, as we all conventionally know, a feature of the Romantic, post-Wordsworthian depiction of childhood ... [which was wedded] ...

within British culture to socialist thought [...]. The process is made clearer if we recognise that this child was always much more than a literary trope, was available as well as one of the means by which scientific and social thought mapped out the psychology of childhood, and the stages of child language development, throughout the century. It was an idea that also provided a context of understanding for the anthropological study of childhood, that established the norms of development with which we operate in modern times (Steedman, 1992: 130).

Steedman's summary here acknowledges the complexity of the issue and of the historical development of child study, in a way which is not apparent in contemporary constructions of 'the child' within both the National Curriculum Statement on English, and the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework for English (DSE, 1995). Nor is this acknowledged in accompanying documents such as the Course Advice (DSE, 1996), or the Professional Development materials also provided by the

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Department of School Education. Nor yet is it addressed in the National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching (NPQTL, 1966).

For my purposes here, an analytical framework for critical discourse analysis has been used to structure the reading of all texts, based on the work of Fairclough (1995) along with Foucault's interrogation of the discursive construction of authority (1977: 138). This post-structuralist framework, which problematises the relations of power and knowledge in play within any discursive practice, allow us to examine the subject of 'the child' in its present-day realisations, and discover the traces of the powerful knowledges that have informed and produced our discourse today.

My analysis, though, also emphasises the importance of Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus for an understanding of social practice. For Bourdieu, who shares the post-structuralist rejection of a rational subject (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), habitus is the set of embodied predispositions that structure and are structured by social interaction. This notion helps explain how it is that interaction in the social group ‘inscribes' on our (children's) bodies, hearts and minds enduring predispositions and ways of behaving and thinking 'naturally' as children in school, though differently as girls and as boys. Our bodies are learning all the time, in and through our daily practice -- and particularly in the often disregarded and seemingly unimportant practices of schooling. Feminist readings of Bourdieu, such as those by McCall (1992) and Moi (1991), argue that these gendered social predispositions are in and of themselves a form of embodied social capital, which, as Bourdieu argues, is acquired as habitus. It is this capital "which children can use, and in which they may invest (and may have to invest), in order to advance themselves throughout the hierarchy of the institution" of school (Kamler et al., 1994: 13). Research has shown that this mostly happens outside of teacher-controlled discourse and activity. It happens when teachers are not consciously teaching -- in the minute material practices of classroom life, and in the spaces between work and play, in the things teachers and children have to do to enable them to 'get things done' in school.

Conclusions about the formation of the classroom habitus also relate to the way in which children, both as a whole class group and as individuals, are shaped as students in and through the official classroom practice. This is accomplished by a process of 'disciplinary work', following Foucault's (1979) view of the 'internalisation of the gaze' of authority in the service of discursive régimes of truth which produce and realise social power relations. Disciplinary work is

designed to help children learn how to be pupils, in relation to the norms of school society, rather than helping them learn about areas of formal knowledge. The disciplinary work of Mrs Wesley was most

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probably very different from that of junior-school literacy teachers today (where fear of death and pain endurance do not, any longer, figure prominently), yet it may well be that her frustration at their difference from the others, who clearly know how to get it all done in a day, is shared by all teachers of the children who need extra attention, control and discipline to be able to get on with their learning.

Teaching and learning

In the incident I discuss below, for instance, an experienced Prep teacher committed to the promotion of gender equity in her school overtly 'mothers' a small boy who has been hurt by a group of girls, employing one of the only examples of this nurturant behaviour that we saw in a month of daily observation. The significance of this behaviour is the focus of analysis here. I wish to argue that emphasis on either psychologistic notions of the 'normal' child as a rational cognitive subject, or Romantic, progressive views of the 'natural' child as an autonomous subject (who will 'naturally' learn if left alone to grow and develop), are clearly inadequate. They do not assist in furthering our understanding of teaching and learning in institutional settings. What is needed are more (and more-convincing) accounts of 'the child' as a convenient fiction. Associated with this must be an emphasis on the situated nature of social practice into which the child-subject is constructed through engagement and interaction with individual and institutional others. And this cannot occur without attention to the history of the present (Meredyth and Tyler, 1993).

In their study of the teacher and child subjects constructed in junior primary English curriculum documents over the past thirty years, for instance, Cormack and Comber (1996) note that successive additions to theoretical understandings of the child and Subject English have usually done little more than add new requirements to the role of the teacher, and which she is required to consciously perform. In successive curriculum documents, they found that

the contingent teacher became a cumulative subject with an ever-widening set of roles and responsibilities. There was faith in the capacity of the teacher to respond, to take on new or repackaged responsibilities, in order to produce the child subject required, and there was great confidence in new truths generated by theory and research (Cormack and Comber, 1996: 141).

The new truths produced in documents such as the Curriculum Standards and Framework documents and the statements of student outcomes against which their practice is judged, occlude the history of the continuing struggle between competing discursive productions of childhood. Yet its tensions are still played out in these official representations of literacy education. The CSF, for instance, struggles with the

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disjunction between the Romantic image of childhood as a time of weakness, and innocence, with children in need of special "care, love, discipline, and protection from evil" (Meyrowitz, 1985: 259), and acceptance of more positivistic views that childhood "is essentially a transitory state" (Steedman, 1992:179-80), and therefore about physiological and cognitive change and development. This tension produces a fractured and generalised view of education and the role of the teacher. The English Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools (Curriculum Corporation, 1994) states that the key assumptions

underpinning its position include the following:

2. The sociocultural and situational context in which English is used will always influence a student's performance of a particular learning task or activity. Teachers, therefore, need to make judgements about students' achievement over time and across a range of tasks and activities involving differing purposes, audiences and types of text. [...]

7. Teachers adopt sound pedagogical principles in their teaching. Sound pedagogy includes particular attention to the following: [...]
b) Constructing teaching and learning programs that recognise the learning needs of individual students and groups of students in order to make the learning outcomes described in the profile as achievable as possible by all students. [...] (Curriculum Corporation, 1994: 3).

Similarly, one of the State variants of the Profile, the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework for English, states that it:

provides seven levels for the reporting of student achievement over the eleven years of schooling covered. Within each strand, the CSF puts together statements of the major material to be covered (curriculum focus) and the expected outcomes which students would attain following successful teaching and learning of that material (standards) (Board of Studies, 1995: 4, original emphasis).

On the surface, of course, the 'truth' about English teaching is deceptively simple. Teachers must (successfully) teach a set of individualised student-subjects situated in widely different sociocultural contexts. They must ensure that their students successfully learn a structured set of prescribed curriculum to prescribed standards or levels. These dominant views, however, are complicated even further by a Foucaultian analysis of social power relations impacting on and in the truths and norms of these discursive regimes.

Teach your children well...

Clarke (1985) writes that mass education was developed by the ruling

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classes as a solution to the threat to established values and entitlement, posed by the rapidly-expanding working classes in the nineteenth century. It was considered "preferable that children should be gathered together in properly conducted schools than that they should be left to roam the gutters" (Clarke 1985:75). The education practices in these schools similarly developed according to these ends, complicated even then by the strengthening social perception of childhood (at least for middle-class children) a special time for play, innocence and wonder:

In the nineteenth century, many uneducated children continued to work in factories beside their parents. [...] Children of the educated were glorified with their own subculture of special books and toys, yet children of the poor and illiterate often provided the labor to support this subculture [...]. As the ideal of universal education became a reality in the nineteenth century, childhood spread to the lower classes (Meyrowitz, 1985: 262).

As Walkerdine (1987) explains, in training the children of the working classes, kindergartens and schools were attempting to eliminate the worst 'excesses' of the lower social orders in line with a bourgeois lifestyle that traditionally shunned physicality of expression, sexuality and manual labour. Certainly the early nursery schools were

aimed at sanitising bad habits and preparing the children of the poor for upright and decent citizenship:

Popular and later compulsory schooling were understood as remedies for the problems of pauperism and criminality, and the school was to become a place where good habits could be ensured through techniques of training in habits of industriousness, produced through constant monitoring and surveillance (Walkerdine 1987, p. 11).

Working-class children's bodies were therefore to be made over and standardised to a class norm, which was tied to a project for an articulated progression through nursery, elementary and secondary schools. As Meyrowitz, (1985: 262) notes, `children were sent to school at an earlier age and remained there for a longer period of time. Age-grading of children and of lessons became stricter and stricter'. The scientific interest in child study, which was developing simultaneously at that time, greatly assisted this precise and scientific ordering of educational experience. It was influenced in part by increasing public understanding and acceptance of the theories of Darwinism, with their emphasis on heredity and biological differentiation within species, and the question of degrees of 'fitness' for survival.

Comenius' view of pedagogy had evolved through the monitorial system into the Herbartian tradition that underpinned primary teacher training

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in Australia until the abolition of the binary system of Higher Education (Reid, 1996). The tenets of this view are still evident in the discourse of much teacher education, and clearly in the vernacular understandings of good teaching which inform our notions of competency today. However, Comenius' disregard of the importance of a teacher's role when a course of study was constructed properly, was found unhelpful once the move to mass education began. Even the early provision of sets of monitors to assist teachers keep order among unruly sets of working-class children was seen as so spectacularly ineffective that it encouraged the inevitable and commonsense belief that bad teaching could cause children not to learn. Notions of measurable mental intelligence which would go on to attribute educational success and failure to such 'natural' factors as class and race (rather than to the quality of teaching) were enthusiastically taken up by new university departments of education originally formed to research and develop the science of pedagogy for mass education (Simon, 1985).

The British Education Act of 1902 saw an official end to interest and development in a science of teaching. Academics grew extremely interested in notions of learning, and the quantification and measurement of ability and mental intelligence. If the ability to learn was an innate and natural attribute of individuals, endowed differentially as a result of human evolution, then the teacher's responsibility now lay clearly in developing the student's knowledge of content to the best of that student's ability. The development of these ideas paralleled and followed the rise of psychology as a science of human measurement. These new discursive fields, with their interest in human development, coalesced in their application to education through a renewed focus of study on ‘the child':

Whether conducted on the traditional biological growth model or in accordance with the life-span orientation that re-emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, psychological studies discuss age-specific individual differences and the relation of age groups to each other with reference to universal 'stages of development' into which the human life-cycle is seen to be naturally divided. (Trethewey, 1995: 43)

In Australia, too, the beginnings of early childhood education were largely aimed at social order and physical health and cleanliness, with pre-school education originating as a philanthropic and voluntary service provided by well-to-do citizens for the children of the deprived. From the beginning of this century, pre-schools were concerned mainly with children's physical health, as well as providing educational activities for the disadvantaged children of poor, working-class, single-parent and 'large' families (Commonwealth Department of Education 1981). These pre-schools were developed under the auspices of government Maternal and Child Health Services in most

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states, drawing on the theory and work of Froebel and Montessori (Tyler 1993). The following statement on the educational goals of pre-school education from the early eighties illustrates the applicability of Walkerdine's claims in this country as well:

Unfortunately there is no set of goals for pre-school education which is widely agreed upon. However, most people would agree ... that schools should serve the needs of society and that they need to encourage faith, honesty and humanity ... (Commonwealth Department of Education 1981: 41).

As Tyler puts it, the kindergarten was a strategy of social reform, "designed as a space where certain habits and propensities would be eliminated, and where desired attributes and capacities would be produced" (Tyler 1993: 357). The move was clearly towards controlling and disciplining the bodies of children in order to access their minds. Each child would be directed towards rational, autonomous and self-regulated behaviour, achieving "control over passion through the steady acquisition of language and an understanding of language as the appropriate vehicle for the expression of wishes and the resolution of conflicts" (Tyler 1993: 361).

Furthermore, the earliest Infants Schools were managed and taught by men, with their wives or sisters acting as assistants, in order to model the 'normal' structure of the middle class patriarchal family, and in emulation of Rousseau's depiction of the ideal education, in which "he postulates [...] the family at its best, with a philosophical father and a cultured mother, keen to do their best as masters and as parents" (Boyd, 1962: 3-4). Yet responsibility within the family for parenting had shifted from the father to the mother in a fairly brief time span, reflecting dramatic social changes, and almost in direct parallel with this, "a subtle shift in the literature from men being both the theoretical experts and the practitioners in the field of infant education, to the role of advising women how to educate young children (Clarke 1985:83), occurred simultaneously.

The conflict between such social practice and the theories from which the notion of child care and education derived thus become clear. As Boyd (1962: 3) notes, for instance, "Rousseau had none of the faith that made Pestalozzi see in the ignorant mother a potential teacher". Rousseau also valued what he called 'negative education', where he considered, for the Émiles of the world at least, that is was better for the child to waste time than to spend it on studies for which he was not 'ready'. This placed an emphasis on the child-subject as autonomous and agentic to a degree that could not be tolerated in working-class children -- at least not in the interests of those dominant within the larger society (Walkerdine, 1990). Even a scientific view of the child, measured and placed appropriately along a development continuum for the purposes of attaining the best possible fit of that child with the furniture, materials and instruction

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provided by the school, would still not prove to be enough.

Strict physical control of the unruly children whose behaviour was outside the bounds of normality in the middle classes was also essential. And remains so. In the National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching, for instance, "positive student behaviour" (a phrase which clearly assumes agreement on what this is) is to be encouraged by competent teachers (NPQTL, 1996: 40). "Some indicators of effective practice for this element" are that the teacher:

- acknowledges appropriate student behaviour and fosters self-discipline among students;
- uses an approach which emphasises consequences for inappropriate behaviour;
- applies a variety of behaviour management strategies, for example, negotiating rules, applying effective sanctions;
- develops clear routines for managing student behaviour consistent with school policy;
- takes appropriate action promptly, firmly, fairly and consistently. (NPQTL, 1996: 40)

This representation of the teacher's practice in relation to questions of appropriate student behaviour presents a curious lack of any reference to the prime means and maintenance of many forms of 'negative' student behaviour -- the materiality of their bodies. These indicators all seem to require conscious action on the part of the teacher. That all or any of them can be contradicted and countered by the quality of an unconscious tremor of anger, a lift of an eyebrow, or the avoidance of an eye provides much food for thought. The interaction of children's and teachers' bodies are central to all face-to-face acts of teaching and learning, and thus can be seen as central to the teaching and learning of literacy, too, though in a slightly different way. To illustrate this, I return briefly to the study of childhood.

Meyrowitz considers that the "potential link between literacy and childhood requires much additional historical research".

There are, however, many obstacles to such research. it is not clear, for example, how to define "literacy". As Eisenstein notes in a different context, there is a vast difference between basic literacy and habitual book reading. "learning to read is different ... from learning by reading" (Meyrowitz, 1985: 263).

Learning to read is indeed the basis of autonomy as a social subject in the print and electronic culture of the present day. It is a fundamental task of schooling for all teachers and students. In many ways, though, the views quoted above are debatable. Many specialists

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in reading education would argue that learning to read can only occur 'by reading'. Providing children with the opportunity to read, then, to learn what it feels like to be a reader in the classroom, is an important aspect of literacy education. As the CSF notes, one desirable outcome for a child at the completion of Level One is that the child will be able to: `Behave like a competent reader and consistently interpret some familiar written symbols' (Board of Studies, 1995: 14). The National Curriculum Profile for English presents this same outcome as: `Roleplays being a competent reader and consistently interprets some familiar written symbols' (Curriculum Corporation, 1994: 20). In both of these texts, children are clearly assumed to learn to read as an embodied activity -- through 'behaving' and 'roleplaying' the act of reading.

Normalising practice: the child in the present

Elsewhere I have discussed the very first time that one group of children experienced this feeling in their classroom. This illustration was taken from a study of the ways in which the embodied knowledge of teachers operates in practice to structure into the bodies of individual children a habitus that reproduces discursively gendered norms or regimes of truth about the normal child (Reid, 1997). My focus was on the nature of school habitus -- the habitus of big grown women, and little children who are together in classrooms for a significant part of each day. My purpose was to demonstrate the complexities of the practice of teaching. I wanted to underline the ways in which the teacher's conscious, rational concern to protect and care equitably for all the children in her care, and set a model standard for normal 'positive' child behaviour, was complicated and contradicted by her own habitus as a 'normed' social subject. A 'mother made conscious' she was, and most certainly, a competent teacher by any 'standard'. But unconsciously, and in her body, she was unable to counteract the history of her own schooling inscribed into her classroom habitus.

My analysis of the incident shows the complexity of meaning and possibility present in the verbal and bodily interaction between teacher and students, and between individual students within the 'corporate body' of the class (Kamler et al., 1994). The teacher is clearly engaged in disciplinary work, and she does it through a display of herself as sympathetic, caring, kind and motherly -- someone not prepared to tolerate any thoughtlessness and hurt of others.

She is indeed a 'mother made conscious', as her performance provided the support and scaffold for a position from which the members of her new class could think and behave, and modelled the language they might use to make sense of this position. But as Fitzclarence (1994) notes, teachers are intellectually trained professionals, and as such they have generally not been well prepared to deal in commonsense ways with

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the demands of rough and aggressive behaviour in school. Teachers' competence is judged in terms of rational discourses of justice and equity in relation to children, so that they operate from an "appropriate ethical position" (NPQTL, 1996: 33). The realm of the socially constructed, non-rational, embodied habitus of classroom practice is far too difficult to accommodate in such terms.

For instance, this teacher tries extremely hard to ensure that she is producing the classroom as a safe place for the children in her charge, and a place where members of her class group respect each other's bodies. She was confronting aggression shown by a group of girls to a male child and dealing with it in terms of her expectation of a different way of being and behaving in school. Yet her own classroom habitus, born of years of practice aimed at achieving the rational, orderly objectives of schooling, was produced under stress as quite contradictory of her explicit feminist impulse to encourage girls' sense of themselves as successful and discourage boys from assuming a priori positions of power in the classroom because of their gender:

[Her] private opinion of [this child's] exuberant performance in the classroom is one of admiration and affection, for instance, although her public interactions with this loud, bouncing, dominant, sexual and hopeful child are overtly disciplinary, drawing her 'back' into behavioural patterns traditionally associated with girls in this social space. Boys exhibiting the same loudness, bounce, sexuality and optimism are certainly disciplined, but this is more to mute and diminish such behaviour, rather than to alter or discourage it as inappropriate in gender terms. (Kamler et al., 1994:13)

There was little ambiguity or contradiction in the teacher's dealings with aggressive behaviour in the classroom. When she saw it happening on this occasion, she moved quickly to deal with it. She was not afraid to interrupt a lesson, or make a scene. She confronted it, and called it as she saw it. But what she saw was one 'problem' girl sitting on the head of the boy. And this girl 'took the rap' for the kick that had been aimed and delivered by a small, sweet, and ostensibly 'innocent' child, which the teacher had not seen. She moved immediately to correct this 'abnormal' child behaviour, by publicly shaming the child, producing her behaviour and her child self as being abnormal for a five-year-old. The child was marked as different from those girls who do not get themselves noticed when they transgress the boundaries of normal childhood behaviour -- the good, quiet little girls who can break the rules with impunity because they don't call out, and who are not seen as likely (or even able) to have done violence to little boys. The desirable norm as a schoolgirl subject has been named, and the 'abnormal' child behaviour must become more like that of the other girls if this child is not to remain outside it. As this incident demonstrated, indeed, the 'normal' children were

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already showing successful performance of the Level One learning outcomes: `Monitors communication of self and others' (Curriculum Corporation, 1994: 19), and `Show awareness of school purposes and expectations for using spoken language' (Board of Studies, 1995: 15), and the deviant child had already fallen behind. As Walkerdine explains:

Meanwhile, meanings are struggled over in the classroom. 'The Child' is created as a sign, to be read and calibrated within the pedagogic discourses regulating the classroom. The child is defined and mapped in its relations of similarity and difference with other signs: activity, experience, play rather than passivity, recitation, work, and so forth. Through the regulation of this pedagogy children become subjected in the classroom (Walkerdine, 1990: 25).

The point and the paradox I want to stress here, though, is that, subject to the dominant discursive patternings of social practice, this teacher was truly, though not literally, unable to 'see' the other girls behaving violently within the classroom habitus. A camera positioned in the room was able to record these actions, and to show the presence of the teacher herself, seated at the side of the room, overseeing the children as they began to learn how to be schoolchildren engaged in the literacy practice of 'silent reading'. During the research time, the teacher in this classroom impressed the research team as an efficient, business-like, and thoroughly professional teacher, operating quite outside the 'early-childhood' stereotype of domesticity and nurturance, even though she herself queries our description of her as 'non-maternal' (Kamler et al., 1994). Yet following Foucault (1979), I argue that, in assisting the children in her charge to discipline themselves in accordance with the discursive norm of child behaviour in school, she is clearly subject to another, more powerful discursive truth.

In breaking from her usual classroom behaviour to take on the openly nurturant postures involved in holding and cuddling the hurt boy, she contradicted the habitus of gender equity that she was consciously attempting to establish in her room. She had not 'mothered' any child until now. She was also breaking into the consciously planned reading lesson in which she was attempting to provide her students with practice at 'roleplaying being readers' in the classroom. Her actions on this morning were therefore significant. All the new schoolchildren in this room had explicit verbal and physical instruction about the

expectations that govern the behaviour of children at school. And it is clear from the video transcript that, unlike the 'abnormal' child, many of them -- all the boys who had moved to the back of the mat area, and whose chatter indicated that could safely assume that they were not the object of this disciplinary work, and all the 'good girl' children, whose 'innocence' is protected by their smallness, meekness and

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humility -- already knew.

Conclusions

My analysis here has shown how a genealogical history can illuminate the complexities of the competencies debate, and the ways in which supposed structures of the discipline of primary English articulate historically with the supposed structure of child development. It has also shown how the discourse of Child Study as reified within present day representations of primary English, by assuming a 'child' re-formed as normal by the disciplinary practice of school and classroom habitus, continues to fail to accommodate or account for larger social and discursive contradictions of race, gender, class and geography.

Of course my argument for the inclusion of the history of educational child study to be used as a frame for, and orientation to, all teacher education curriculum suggests that I believe (or hope) that knowledge of the discursive norms produced by different and competing views of the child will be enough to bring about the sorts of reflective practical change to the habitus of the corporate bodies of schools and classrooms that, I argue, are desirable for a socially just education. Yet this rational hope is clearly not enough. Rational intention is not played out automatically, as a matter of course, in the embodied habitus of the classroom, where knowledge remains invested with the power of the normative regimes of wider social truth. The competencies debate highlights what Green (1997) calls the 'demonisation' of "so-called progressive teaching, in the context of what is regarded as an unduly liberal and even permissive educational climate, and ultimately, English teaching".

'Competency' is a crucial keyword for the present -- an image not just of the child-learner but of the teacher, where both are objects of official desire. The Competent Teacher, as produced in the pages of the National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching (NPQTL, 1996), is still, and in deed, a 'mother made conscious' -- a product of her history. From the beginnings of mass education, for instance, the nursery teacher has been marked as different from others by the referent pronoun 'she', and, as Apple notes:

At its very outset, proponents of [the urban graded school] had a specific labor force in mind. [...] Rather than leaving it up to the teachers, the curriculum was quite standardized along grade level lines, with both teachers and students divided into these grades. [...] Again, women's supposed nurturing capabilities and 'natural' empathic qualities and their relatively low salaries made them ideally suited for teaching in such schools (Apple, 1986: 64. My emphasis).

In Green's (1997) terms, what is at issue here is the "figure of the Teacher, as a central term within what is in effect both a social imaginary and a certain complex cultural-symbolic field". This ideal

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teacher manages a happy classroom, "where passion is transformed to the safety of reason" (Walkerdine, 1990: 23). In turn, the Competent Child, as produced in the pages of the CSF and the National Curriculum for English, is an abstract subject, a self-regulating child, who must demonstrate her readiness for literacy and learning, in and through her embodied self regulation to the 'bonds of convention'.

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