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Questioning diversity: practices, discourses and the early childhood education profession

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Abstract

Given economic rationalism, diversity is construed as a competitive advantage, the production of hidden potential for the benefit of employing institutions. Seen as another word for difference, diversity admits complexity, a crossing of boundaries, voices from peripheries. By questioning discourses this paper focuses indirectly on who works in bureaucracies and administration, and who works in the professions of education and care for ECE and its higher education. In these locations information about race, home language, religion, social class, ability and sexual preference may be seen as private, without public surveillance. Further, the effects of cultural normalizations (in higher and on-going education for early childhood, in day care centres and classrooms) construct not cultural transformations but assimilations in practice. So positive potentials of diversity in the professions disperse. The research around this paper is funded by the Norwegian Research Council to investigate pedagogical institutions for children aged 0-10. Its foci are gender, complexity and diversity. In Norway much work is currently being done to recruit people of difference and of minority groups to the early childhood professions. To revision the professionalism of teachers, carers, lecturers, researchers and policy makers (paid in the name of education and care) is to see the possibilities differently, to hear the voices and see embodied people of difference, and people positioned otherwise.

Starting section

What follows here is a critical presentation of the concept of diversity, as in the writings of Beck (2001), Bernhard (2001), Le Roux (2001), McLaren and Farahmandpur (2001), and Mohanty (1990). This is then taken up by considering implications for ECE (Early Childhood Education), by briefly bringing in some ideas about diversity from Viruru (2002), Gallop (2000), and Arendt (1968). In contrast with this is what is happening in management discourses, as presented and discussed by Peregi (in AIPBW 2002, and by Bacchi (2000). The paper concludes with presentations from the writings of Hytten and Adkins (2001), where a 'pedagogy of whiteness' is aiming to expose, study and disrupt discourses simply representing 'diverse experiences'. All of this is juxtaposed with my notes of everyday realities from the field of practice: education and care for the very young. I made the notes over the last twelve months, scribbling in pencil at the time and place of the events. A political agenda for change is built into the writing of this paper.

We begin with Mohanty, and see how diversity has been differently constructed ten years after her publication. From this I point to the reconceptualization of diversity in early childhood education (Grishaber and Cannella (2001; Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 1998; Rhedding-Jones, 2000b; 2001; 2002a). Having named the new research project (2002-2004, funded by the Norwegian Research Council), 'Gender, Complexity and Diversity in Pedagogical Institutions for Children Aged 0-10: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations', a beginning task is an undoing of diversity. To work as (a) narrator, (b) theorist and (c) social activist, as did Hannah Arendt (Schutz, 2001), I therefore insert into the text of my discussions (a) some ethnographic and autobiographic extracts, (b) some theoretical and conceptual positionings and (c) a radical agenda for practical change and action in early schooling, day care and teacher education. In this particular paper some of these insertions are more in evidence than others. I am using footnotes as a shorthand for blending in my 'observations' and over-hearings in preschool day care centres in two quite different countries. The children are aged from one to six. The teacher-carers have professional training for a minimum of three years. The assistants working with them have three months training at the most; some have no formal training. All of this is a woman-dominated practice, with some institutions employing no men at all.

Who works in the ECE (Early Childhood Education) professions is becoming a crucial question, from both gendered and linguistic/ethnic/religious points of view. The day care centre is a public institution, although what happens there concerns the private lives of the workers and the players, the young and the relatively old. Here race, home language, religion, social class, ability and sexual preference may be seen as private, without public surveillance. Hence we do not know statistics for how many people belong to particular categories (apart from whether they are men or women and how old they are); nor do we know what kinds of crossings over and temporary shifts there are between the 'categories'. (of race, languages, religions, multi and shifting ethnicities, Bonnett and Carrington, 2000). One thing that is certain is that those of us who saw ourselves as not on the periphery must now begin to question our own centrality. We must ask who it is who gets less pay, less say and more marginalizing. What is slowly beginning is a re-vision of the professionalism of teachers, carers, lecturers, researchers and policy makers paid in the name of education and care. This revision means seeing the possibilities differently, hearing the voices differently, and seeing embodied people of difference, people positioned otherwise. In all of this, where the children stand is what matters. Rather than spell this out I show it (in this paper) as an ongoing subtext. This I do not want to reduce to a smaller font or less words: children and professional practices with them are diminished enough as it is.

Very often the difference between the parents and the teachers, in terms of higher and lesser education, relative poverty and richness, relates directly to social class. How this impacts with gender, race and linguistic difference, within and without the institutions of education and care, requests interrogation. A further problem with 'multicultural' education is that assimilation practices pretend to transform. This is because of who is in charge, and what they think counts as transformation; which they might call, less radically, 'integration'. My contention is that the effects of cultural normalizations (in higher and on-going education for early childhood, in day care centres and classrooms) construct not cultural transformations but assimilations in practice. So the positive potentials of diversity in the professions disperse.

Five contrasting sets of quotes about diversity

This section considers what five differently placed writers have to say about diversity. Chandra Mohanty's publication was ten or eleven years before the others. She wrote of challenges for education, regarding race and voice. I look at what of her writing has been taken up or ignored by Sarah Beck in *The Harvard Educational Review* last year; by Judith

Benhard writing last year about identity and language in 'early years'; and by Johann Le Roux writing two years ago about the cultural responsibility of schools. In contrast, Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur write of 'revolutionary citizenship as a pedagogy of resistance', also last year. Because I am wanting to highlight contemporary practice whilst dealing with these, and because I shall take this paper further, I am not attempting to present an full overview of what these writers say. For much of this section I shall let them speak for themselves, one after the other, not necessarily in the order above.

Mohanty (1990, p. 180) warns us against 'the analytic categories and political positionings ... that position Third World women as a homogeneous, undifferentiated group leading truncated lives, victimised by the combined weight of "their" traditions, cultures, and beliefs, and "our" (Eurocentric) history.' The brackets, italics, capital letters and inverted commas are Mohanty's. Calling for reconceptualization she says (p. 181):

The challenge of race resides in a fundamental reconceptualization of our categories of analysis so that differences can be historically specified and understood as part of larger political processes and systems. The central issue, then, is not one of merely *acknowledging* difference; rather, the more difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged. Difference seen as a benign variation (diversity), for instance, rather than as conflict, struggle, or the threat of disruption, bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious, empty pluralism.

Wary of such emptiness, she cautions us regarding what she calls 'a discourse of "harmony in diversity" ' (p. 181). To make clear her position, Mohanty analyses (p. 184) 'the workshops on "diversity" for upper level (largely white) administrators' regarding 'the operation and management of discourses of race and difference'. She also analyses 'the women's studies classroom' and says 'the links between these two educational sites lie in the (often active) *creation* of discourses of "difference"'. Speaking of universities, but with applications I think to other related education institutions, such as those of early childhood education and care, Mohanty says

(p. 191), 'the liberal nature of the institution as a whole, is the sort of attitudinal engagement with diversity that encourages and empty cultural pluralism and domesticates the historical agency of Third World peoples.' Depending on their nation of residence or citizenship, and what year it is, people from immigrant backgrounds prefer various self-descriptors. So Mohanty's Third World peoples in USA in 1990 might elsewhere be called 'from the South', or from developing countries, or immigrants or 'minorities'; Mohanty has not written of the Indigenous. Getting the local term wrong, or omitting who matters, is a gross insult, so working internationally (Rhedding-Jones, 2002d) requires care.

In showing how management discourses gloss over the historical complexities and depoliticization of race, Mohanty says what is wrong with a discourse of individualism, where each person is supposed to be representative of their own cultural group just by being there; and where we say everyone is valuable (p. 195):

an attitudinal engagement ... bypasses the complexly situated politics of knowledge and potentially shores up a particular individual-oriented codification and commodification of race. It implicitly draws on and sustains a discourse of cultural pluralism, or what Henry Giroux calls "the pedagogy of normative pluralism", a pedagogy in which we all occupy separate, different, and equally valuable places and where experience is defined not in terms of individual *qua* individual, but in terms of an individual as representative of a cultural group. This results in a depoliticization

and dehistoricization of the idea of culture and makes possible the implicit management of race in the name of cooperation and harmony.

One of the effects of this is that institutions such as higher education for Early Childhood Education and Care might now have set up 'Centres of Multicultural Excellence'; without going beyond the simplicities of discourses of individualism and cultural harmony. Here the problem is that administrators with management mentalities might have priorities other than those to which Mohanty points. Of 'the predominantly white upper-level administrators at our institutions and their "reading" of the issues of racial diversity and pluralism' (p. 197) she says 'it is important not to ignore the power of a predominantly managerial class (men and women) who, in fact, frame and hence determine *our* voices, livelihoods, and sometimes even our political alliances.' Noticeably, says Mohanty (p. 199)

upper echelons of administration at the college ... presidents and their male colleagues don't go to workshops; they "consult" about issues of diversity. Thus, this version of "prejudice reduction" takes the form of "managing diversity" (another semantical gem which suggests that "diversity" (a euphemism for people of color) will be out of control unless it is managed).

The key ideas of 'Diversity Consultants' (p. 201) involve the following, with the brackets being Mohanty's:

an awareness of race issues (the problem is assumed to be cultural misunderstanding or lack of information about other cultures), understanding yourself and people unlike you (diversity - we must respect and learn from each other; this may not address economic exploitation, but it will teach us to treat each other civilly), negotiating conflicts, altering organization sexism and racism, and devising strategies to assess and manage the challenges of diversity (which results in an additive approach: recruiting "diverse" people, introducing "different" curriculum units while engaging in teaching as usual - that is, not shifting the normative culture versus subcultures paradigm).

I am quoting Mohanty at length because of the power of her voice, and because of what shall follow in this paper as from the field of ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care). Also I am aware of the fact that many people without academic backgrounds in Women's Studies or Cultural Studies have not read Mohanty. Regarding culture, she said twelve years ago, and ahead of her time (p, 201):

Culture is seen as noncontradictory, as isolated from questions of history, and as a storehouse of nonchanging facts, behaviours, and practices. This particular definition of culture and cultural difference is what sustains the individualized discourse of harmony and civility that is the hallmark of cultural pluralism... The baseline is still "maintaining the status quo" - diversity is always and can only be added on.

This then can be read as the case against 'diversity', which explains the resistance I got from radical colleagues when I put the word (diversity) into the name of my research project. But I have learned that using words helps you to get jobs and needed money, and that what you do with a word afterwards is your own business. To conclude my presentation of Mohanty's position regarding diversity is one last quote (p. 207-8):

a public culture of dissent entails creating spaces for epistemological standpoints that are grounded in the *interests* of people and which recognise the *materiality* of conflict, or privilege, and of domination. Thus creating such cultures is fundamentally about making the axis of power transparent in the context of academic, disciplinary,

and institutional structures as well as in interpersonal relationships (rather than individual relations) in the academy. It is about taking the politics of everyday life seriously as teachers, students, administrators, and members of hegemonic academic cultures. Culture itself is thus redefined as incorporating individual and collective memories, dreams, and history that are contested and transformed through the political praxis of day-to-day living. This requires working hard to understand and to theorize questions of knowledge, power, and experience in the academy so that one effects both pedagogical empowerment as well as transformation. The task is open to all - people of color as well as progressive white people ...

From these statements of Mohanty's then the following may be contrasted. Regarding Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke's 1998 book called *Supporting Identity, Diversity and Language in the Early Years* (1998), Bernhard (2001, p. 117) says in *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, [the book] 'has as its goal the promotion of respect for diversity ... there are diverse pathways to development ... A rating scale on diversity goes beyond respecting others, to active anti-bias efforts at including minority people in the programme.' Here my question is: from what discourse of diversity does this reviewer draw? In her next sentence Bernhard says 'Because I am a developmentalist ... I paid special attention to chapter 5 ...'. Here it should be noted a 'developmentalist' is not talking about Third World peoples from 'developing' countries. These two very different discourses of development, I would point out, are at historical, cultural and theoretical odds with each other.

Bernhard (p. 118) says of the book reviewed, 'The authors provide a quick overview of cross-cultural issues' [but that] 'there is a paucity of substantive, cross-cultural material, forcing the authors to rely solely on rights-based arguments and moral injunctions.' Here whilst I might write of social justice and ethics, Bernhard as a developmentalist writes of morals: again these are, as I understand them, not the same discourse. Reading further she says 'While it is useful to appeal to educators' moral sense in respecting differences, it is equally important that people generally understand the diversity of human living in the various cultures, through first hand information, particularly about diverse ways to learning'. At this point, if you have followed Mohanty as I have hoped to lead you, you will see that Bernhard apparently wants to white-out cultures, and leave learning as child development intact. Hence she sees information as more important than theory, and fails to see all information as discursively constructed. This relates to her comment earlier, where she insinuates that 'education' is inferior to real research: and knowledge which regards the 'developmental'. This may be read as the colonization of pedagogy by psychology. Where Bernhard's diversity comes in is via what Mohanty names and critiques as 'harmony' and 'individualism'.

Also at stake here is the status of the disciplines of anthropology and cultural studies, when developmental psychology is allowed to judge their research methodologies and their theories. Although Bernhard pays lip service to anthropology, it appears that she is not too cognisant of its ramifications and its ethnographic implications for a positivist or interpretivist research methodology (Rhedding-Jones, 1996; 2003a in press). Hence in her judgment (p. 118) 'there is a reliance on secondary sources, some of which are education articles rather than developmental or anthropological investigations, and therefore some sacrifice of depth.' The assumption here is that in order to produce 'depth' research or books, we need to become developmentalists (here psychology is the hidden referent, the word which need not be spoken, so normalized has it become) or anthropologists. From whence does this developmentalist get anthropology? From the suggestion of an editor maybe? What place could anthropology possibly have in this reviewer's position regarding diversity? Is it because anthropology is seen as a 'first hand' discipline (after Margaret Mead perhaps)? Why are social justice and 'morals' seen not as 'first hand'? What of the 'first hand' experience of the first-named editor of the book reviewed (Iram Siraj-Blatchford)? As you see

I will not take a review at face value; nor do I want my own writing to go unremarked and unused. In conclusion (p. 119) Bernhard says the book 'would be strengthened by the addition of factual material about variation in children's development, from anthropological sources.' Here it is clear, at least to me (and I do have a four year major in Psychology from many years ago), that what Bernhard wants are facts and child development. So what hope can there be in 'diversity' given this agenda? Finally Bernhard gives away her understanding of diversity: it is just another word for 'various', with no place whatsoever for race (p. 119): 'The book [reviewed] makes a substantial contribution to improving pedagogy in diverse contexts.' This then appears to be why Bernhard wants anthropology: so that the 'diverse contexts' and their outcomes may be compared with each other, and children's development in various places can be named as first hand fact.

Turning to a well known radical in education, here writing with Farahmandpur (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001) I note that the pair make no mention of the term 'diversity'. Is this because they share the approach taken by Mohanty? It appears that there is another reason. The omission of diversity in this book is because of McLaren and Farahmandpur's Marxist attack on capitalism and neoliberalism. I shall try to take this paper further by using this perspective of theirs to point to some possibilities for critical pedagogy, and to say why social class has been left off the agenda of the managers of diversity in institutions. Given capitalism's connections to racism, because of economic rationalism and market driven ideologies in globalization, the state serves the ruling classes. Consequently public education is defunded and education becomes a for-profit industry following a corporate model of management. Critical educators, resisting this and following social justice agendas, 'have engaged in a spirited counteroffensive to current economic policies aimed at widespread support for standardized tests, mandated textbooks, school-based management, a shared school mission, and the deskilling of teachers' (2001: 355). Such teachers' work is thus integral to class struggle, which McLaren and Farahmandpur, (p. 372) see as featuring and approaching 'racial, gender, or sexual identities, through lived experience'. Hence:

Educational policies grounded on the ideology of economic rationalism engineer a view of democratic schooling as premised upon the harmonization of differences among ethnic groups and social classes, thereby mistaking the phenomenon needing explanation for the explanation itself. Racism is a symptom of capitalist exploitation, not the cause of social affliction. Hence teachers are deflected from examining the interrelationship among race, class and gender oppression within the context of global capitalist relations. (2001, p. 363)

The implications of this are that 'the multicultural' assumes a harmonic pedagogic practice, with race, class and gender erased. From saying how this happens, through capitalist exploitations and espoused notions of democracy, McLaren and Farahmandpur call for a revolutionary agency and citizenship, where activists put a stop to the treatment of the world's 'poor and aggrieved' (Rhedding-Jones, 2003b forthcoming). Token 'diversity', with its rhetoric of 'effective schooling being culturally responsive' (as in Le Roux, 2001) thus has no place.

The positionings of *critical educators* with social justice agendas (such as McLaren and Farahmandpur; or Grieshaber and Cannella, 2001), and *managers of schooling* (such as Le Roux) addressing 'educational needs', 'teachers' effectiveness' and 'training for competence' (Le Roux, 2001, pp. 49, 45, 46), thus could not be further apart. In taking up the critical educator stance I next adopt a strategy of conflict and criticism, to show that what underpins the 'diversity' rhetoric may be undesirable in the extreme. To do so I look closely at what Le Roux (2001) in the international refereed journal *Intercultural Education* has written. Here my

long-term hope is to change the positioning of the privileged by making possible the transforming of the relations of power.

I begin at the end of le Roux's article, as that is where many writers say what lies closest to themselves. Here Le Roux makes his claim that reason supports his 'culturally responsive or culturally reflective education' (2001, p. 49) as 'the most effective educational strategy or approach to address the educational needs of a culturally diverse classroom population successfully.' Here then are the words of a man sure of his argument, and of the power of superlatives. As what is at stake is the effectiveness of the teacher educator, diversity has become reduced to a culturally diverse classroom. What Le Roux means by his 'culturally responsive education' is exemplified on the previous page. Here he says 'an accommodative, appreciative and responsive approach to the reality of cultural diversity is of the utmost importance'. Then after a quote from Dame Tamsyn Imison, about understanding one culture being like seeing with only one eye but understanding two cultures making you 'binocular' and thus allowing you 'to appreciate much more' (p. 48), Le Roux lists six bullet-pointed 'well known sayings' from the cultures of China, Germany, Ecuador, the Philippines, Vietnam and Africa. For example 'Talk does not cook the cabbage' comes from Germany. This is prefaced by the advice that 'Philosophies underlying the following well-known sayings should thus [following the binocular metaphor] be integrated into an effective culturally responsive education system for the 21st century.'

This ties in with the assumptions crafting statements about literacy research as 'capturing' (Beck, 2001: 299). Discussing the potential of Vygotsky's conceptual framework, which Beck says is 'to capture the complexity of culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms', it is clear that diversity is here just another variable to be researched/captured and then managed. As 'education issues in a diverse society' (p. 299) and 'linguistically diverse classrooms [that] offer data from interactions' (p. 300), Beck's focus is not on who might comprise the diversity and why, but on the functionality of a descriptor. Using an example of a teacher-researcher who 'apprentice[d] her African American students into the practices of formal literary scholarship' (what is that and how old were they?), Carol Lee, described in Beck (p. 300), 'illustrates how Vygotsky's distinction between spontaneous concepts and scientific concepts ... can illuminate ways of helping students from a nonmainstream cultural background to develop the academic skills that they need to succeed in schools.' No mention here of cultural capital; of class differences; of the historical construction of race; of why a white American (Fine, 1996) labels blacks as 'non' anything; of the whiteness of the literary scholarship that the African Americans are being inculcated into; of why 'helping' is the operative word when earlier the metaphor was that of an apprentice. Furthermore, Vygotsky himself comes from another time and another place. Does this explain why he saw the 'spontaneous' and the 'scientific' as two separate entities? Does it explain why he saw them at all? What were the words he used when he did his original writing which then got translated into English thirty years ago? Concepts and words, as I am trying to show, are slippery as ice.

Implications for early childhood education

I have presented these writers (Mohanty, Bernhard, McLaren and Farahmandpur, Le Roux, and Beck) to show that diversity is not a word to be picked up and used lightly. It is absolutely loaded with complexities, innuendos and omissions. If you are going to say it or write it then beware the possibilities of meaning, the allegiances your readers and listeners will think you have. Will you take up Mohanty's position and go way beyond the doggerel of respect and acknowledgment? Are you an educational manager like Le Roux and needing effective outcomes? Do you know what McLaren and Farahmandpur want you to do to fight capitalism and its links to the multicultures in your school or day care or education faculty? Do you think an anti-bias emphasis is enough? Are you a developmentalist like Bernhard

seeing 'our' diverse present day society and wanting the culturally sensitive learning environments that she thinks are necessary? What about Beck? Where is Vygotsky and cognition and collaborative inquiry in all of this? How radical are you prepared to be? From which race do you come? Are you exploring the nature and the consequences of diversity on the basis of gender (Rhedding-Jones, 1997), sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and disability? Will you consider theories and methodologies in relation to exclusionary or inclusionary practices of diverse students? Are you offering critical insights on the problematization of difference and inclusion: the contested subject of diversity? (I have got bits of the last three sentences from a symposium proposal I was sent on the internet, for the American education research conference next year.)

Looking for a newly published Early Childhood Education perspective on all this I read the following by Radhika Viruru. From fieldwork in her homeland of India she says (2002, p. 37):

'the concept of the 'Relation' sees the Other as equal, and as a presence that is necessary because it is different ... Another important aspect of the concept of Relation is that it is opposed to the idea of 'essence' ... To exist in Relation, is to be part of an ever-changing and diversifying process, whereas to be reduced to an essence is to be fixed with permanent attributes.'

Here then is diversity not as categories, as visible results of race and what we wear, as body and as fixed. Viruru's diversity is a process: a verbal not a nominative case. And an 'ever-changing and diversifying process' exists because of our relations with other people, other discourses, other positionings. From the fieldnotes (now footnotes) that I made in the New York and the Norwegian Day Cares it appears that the diversity I have recorded regards embodied race; not the processes of changing languages, of non-essentialist shift (Rhedding-Jones, 2001). Yet the Pakistani Norwegian woman (Tsolidis, 2001) singing the Norwegian songs to the children was in fact dressed in traditional Pakistani clothes, resisting the categories of Norwegian nation. Or was she? I saw her as other to the Norwegians, more like me, and maybe this is why she confided in me. But because of the one-way glass in the New York 'observation room', and because I live not in New York but in Norway, I failed to relate to women there who I labelled as 'African American' and 'Hispanic': another sign of my whiteness. Yet in not saying which of the 3-5 year olds were 'Asian' or 'of color' then perhaps I have only partly failed the researcher test. Here Jane Gallop (2000, p. 15) tells me:

Genuine openness to diversity needs more than diversely representative authors. As much as *who* we read - even more, I would say - it matters *how* we read. ... If we do not pay close attention to what we read, our reading for diversity will only end up projecting ... stereotypes.

The same applies, I think, to the reading and writing of fieldnotes for research projects. It simply isn't enough to say who is differently bodied, who appears otherwise. What matters is how we will read the events and the sites of institutionalized practice in relation to our own concept of diversity, and that includes our own selves. If I am to learn from who I meet, in a day care centre, a school and elsewhere, I have to be open to changing my own previously held ideas. Yet diversity is not what I thought it was, and I do not trust language enough to want to ask people how they are positioned and believe what they say.

So here is the point of questioning diversity. It is only when we keep to an agenda of social justice that the effects of ethnic, linguistic, religious and racial diversity might become ethical. This then is what we need to work for, and this is the reason for changing practices and changing who does the work (called play when we work with the young) and how.

Diversity in management discourses

Because I am writing this from Norway, I quote from the newsletter of a network of which I here am a member. The AIPBW News (Association of International Business and Professional Women) (2002, volume 9, number 2, p. 2 says:

At the first meeting of the new season, AIPBW members were treated to a well prepared but flexible presentation on diversity by Elisabeth Peregi, Director of Lindex AS. Lindex is a clothing company that operates 349 stores in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Germany. ... The first four sections of her talk gave an overview of the company; the gender balance of its leadership and staff today; the management structure and relations with local stores/markets; and recruitment practices (past and present). Then she shared her idea of what a good 'mix' means for Lindex, how to achieve it, and generally why she believes in diversity. It is easy to see why Lindex received a "*Ledelse - Likestilling - Mangfold*" award. [a Leadership, Equity and Diversity award] ... Peregi said it was not as easy to achieve diversity with regard to national and ethnic background. There have been other nationalities in the topmost management but only limited success recruiting diverse staff at lower levels. She observed that it is good for business if the sales personnel reflect the diversity of the customers - mostly an issue in the larger cities. ... She [Peregi] believes strongly that diverse teams make better decisions. She has been hesitant to include explicit diversity targets in the personnel manuals because empty talk without results can be damaging to the company. She confirmed it was possible to 'work one's way up' the career ladder within the company, but mentioned that minorities are hesitant to apply for local management jobs. She couldn't suggest why this was the case.' ... In conclusion Elisabeth Peregi stressed that the support of diversity must be part of the corporate culture; it may help to codify it - not something Lindex has done), but this will be insufficient. In her own efforts to achieve diversity, she resorts to 'new hires' as well as ways to 'educate' existing staff. She says that it is not very difficult to set up an interview so that she can recognise when an applicant's mindset and values are similar to her own.

What are the implications of this for early childhood education? How might the desire of ECE employers for the 'mix' of the child and parent 'clients' to be 'reflected' in the employment of lower and higher level staff cause similar eventualities? Why does Elisabeth Peregi never name race? Why is there no mention of multilingual competence, cross-cultural skills and arts, transformation of the workplace? What sort of diversity is this and for whose benefit is it operating?

In another news item in the same publication (AIPBW News, 2002, p. 7) is information about 'Career advice in the Norwegian media'. [This newsletter is in English for foreign professionals like me.] Here it says:

the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (UD) look for top academic marks [when they are recruiting], but Accenture [I do not know what this is] advised that having the top academic performance wasn't necessarily their top criteria for employment. Equally or more important was (*sic*) social skills. While most employers emphasize engagement and the ability to communicate particularly in face to face situations such as the interview, many are also looking for broad experience. ... In the interview, they are looking for beaming personalities - for people to be themselves and demonstrate a capacity for multi-dimensional thinking.

This then clearly explains why some people do not get the jobs for which they are well qualified and well experienced. For immigrants and those of minority 'backgrounds' it is

obviously best to adopt the ways of being of the majority, to ape the words and actions of those in power. Here for critical and theoretical support, after Mohanty, I turn to Carol Bacchi (2000). She says 'the language of workplace diversity is supplanting equal employment opportunity' (p. 64) and that a management discourse is positioning 'managing diversity as the way "forward". Here 'the words "reasonable" and "practicable" will [she warns us, p. 67] ... become the hallmarks of workplace initiatives in relationship to equity in the future.' Again, who uses the words, and why, must be our questions (Rhedding-Jones, 2004 forthcoming).

Writing of Australia, Bacchi (2000, p. 68) describes 'the post-1996 emergence of "workplace diversity programs" in both state and federal public service documents'. She says the so-called 'productive diversity... emphasizes the need for ... members of organizations to change, to learn new languages, for example, and to learn to assess the value of different ways of doing things, instead of insisting that there is only one way.' Following this, a productive diversity in institutions will be against 'shared vision and corporate culture, teams, win-win conflict situations, benchmarking, setting standards, quality management'. While we may agree with this, there is still the problem of what to do about hidden discrimination. Here productive diversity is against affirmative action, but it holds that diversity is good for business. The underlying discourses (Rhedding-Jones, 2000a) according to Bacchi are a social justice understanding and individual differences. The problem she says (p. 71) is that 'in some hands this insistence upon "individual differences" can mean simply bypassing groups and government intervention. It is this tendency which I believe characterizes mainstream approaches to diversity.'

So with a 'mainstream' approach to diversity the focus is on the 'other' (Rhedding-Jones, 2000c): on individuals seen as 'different'. At the same time there is a rhetoric of social justice. Despite this a productive diversity might move an institution beyond assimilation and the prevailing practice of organizational monoculturalism. Bacchi says that the effect of this mainstream approach is to totalize and individualize. This means that 'qualitative differences among employees are equalized or averaged and translated into workplace norms governings behaviour and performance.' (p. 71) Here we can see this happening in our larger institutions of early childhood's higher education, with their spin-off effects in the day care centres. Bacchi says (p. 72) 'I would suggest that managing diversity has as its goal the same ideal of consensus and the elimination of conflict [as a mainstream approach to diversity] but that it is based on the contention that this can best be accomplished by *acknowledging* differences and differentiation, so long as this difference is seen to lodge in individuals.' Relatedly, 'feminists and other identity groups have been working theoretically to find ways to acknowledge that "women" as a group, for example, is marked internally by differentiation along class, race, ethnic, age, ability and sexual preference lines' (p. 73).

At this point Bacchi introduces 'a theoretical development, commonly called postmodernism, which wanted to emphasise people's multiple affiliations' (p. 73). Here 'concern about "essentialist" categories, including "women", has produced intense debates about the advisability or dangers of making appeals on the basis of identity'. Bacchi says 'activists need to be wary of reifying these categories by making them the basis of political claims' [and to take care not to] 'undermine broader social change by enshrining constructed social categories which serve the purposes of defenders of the status quo.' Although Bacchi here writes about women, the same may be said for people marginalized or excluded for reasons other than gender, and indeed for men as a minority in early and pre schooling. In summary, there is a 'variety of political developments associated with the language of diversity' and we need to 'scrutinise carefully the political agendas with which it [diversity] is associated.' Bacchi does not rule out diversity, saying instead (p. 74) that:

a diversity agenda could be transformative, trying as it does to insist that inclusiveness means more than assimilation into existing work rules. In other hands, however, diversity transforms workers into isotopes who need to be dealt with on a one-to-one basis. ...This individualising discourse will in the end make it more and more difficult to demand pro-active efforts, such as affirmative action, to address asymmetrical power relations between social groups.

So as Bacchi points out there are tensions 'between an "individual differences" and a "social justice" approach to diversity' (p. 74). We must therefore be wary of institutions that 'introduce "innovative recruitment and promotion strategies to meet their business objectives" (p. 75). As Bacchi points out, such institutions are usually free to *not* introduce these strategies also. Another institutional practice to watch is the 'downplaying [of] the importance of asymmetrical power relations between groups' (p. 75). Here the watering down of diversity leaves it meaning just as much the differences between the dominant groups themselves as between the dominant and the non-dominant. The following, for example, is from a 1998 Australian public service document: 'Diversity also refers to the ways we are different in other respects such as educational level, work experience, socio-economic background, personality profile, geographic location, marital status and whether or not one has carer responsibilities' (Bacchi p. 75-6). This sentence follows immediately the public service institution's statement that "Diversity relates to gender, age, language, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, religious belief and family responsibilities.' (Bacchi, p. 75) Note here how family responsibility has crept in, but race and disability are left out. Our question must be: who wrote this and what was their own agenda?

Because Bacchi informs us in much needed ways regarding diversity I continue to quote her at length, before my concluding focus on professionals and their work with very young. It will be seen that I am indirectly targetting the following: recruitment and promotion practices in the professions; student intake at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; and the effects of these for parents and their offspring. Further, I would apply the quote that follows to institutional practices of employment, to promotions, and to the assessment of students' assignments (Rhedding-Jones 2002b): 'in the material discussing workplace diversity, merit is consistently positioned as in opposition to "special treatment" ... 'this privileging of "merit" puts in question the claim that managing diversity moves beyond assimilation to the creation of a genuinely inclusive organisational culture.' (Bacchi, p. 76) Questions here are who decides what the skills required to perform the work duties are? What are the goals of the institution and who made them up? Who says that this practical work or writing is (not) what is required or what is excellent? How far can diversity get in changing what happens as institutional practice?

As Bacchi points out, diversity discourses are being played off against equity for women and other lesser earners. 'I am suggesting that the language of flexibility is being used to justify a diminution of commitment to workplace equity.' (p. 78) Much of this is happening at the level of policy, with decisions made by administrators. 'I suggest that a first step in assessing a policy is to consider how it constructs the problem', says Bacchi (p. 78). 'My contention is a simple one - if you disagree with the way a problem is understood and represented you are unlikely to find the proposal helpful.' Here 'the material on workplace diversity, despite the talk about creating an inclusive organisational culture, offers a simplistic and individualistic understanding of the problem.' For Bacchi (p. 79) "'values", like "flexibility" and indeed like "diversity" itself, seem on their face to be desirable foci for organisational change. But each term needs to be examined for the political uses it serves ... and for the way in which it constructs the problem.' What happens is that replacing rules with values 'produces a psychologising analysis in the place of a structural understanding of the problem. In effect, discrimination becomes a matter of individual prejudice, ignoring insights into the systemic character of discriminatory practices.' All of this is 'weakening the provisions of the

Affirmative Action Act [which was intended for women] as the logical flipside of an effort to enshrine a new equity discourse, managing diversity.' (p. 79) Thus 'the language of diversity can achieve a number of useful goals [but] we need to be aware of how it can serve a deregulation agenda.' In summary, Bacchi says (p. 79-80):

Key points here are the undermining of equity groups through a focus on "individual differences", and the displacement of scrutiny of employer practices through locating the "problem" in the heads of individuals. Those attempting to implement progressive change would do well to direct their efforts to contesting these claims, reasserting the importance of equity groups and the systemic character of discrimination.

Workers and players: professionals and the very young

Bringing this all back to the workplace of the ECE professionals, which is the playplace of the very young (Rhedding-Jones, 2002c) I read Hytten and Adkins (2001, p. 433) who say:

the student population grows increasingly diverse, the teaching force remains predominantly white, and the achievement of minority students continues to lag significantly behind their white counterparts. ... University presidents may proclaim "We are committed to diversifying our faculty," and yet the rate of minority faculty attrition remains high. ... We continue to fail our diverse students at an alarming rate and in diverse ways. We need to look beyond our intentions to examine more carefully our assumptions, beliefs, practices, and their actual effects, especially on nonwhite students. Not only does whiteness ... affect the way we interpret educational issues in a diverse society, it also leads us to think we can confront the issues without necessarily including the voices of others. In other words, our whiteness assures us that we know what we are doing and we understand what needs to be done.

Hytten and Adkins may not have had in mind a student population of two to five year olds, as in my footnotes: the *ped* of pedagogy. I would contend though, that the same statements apply. Where there is institutionalized pedagogy, even in the name of play, care, and the learning of the national language in the face of the language(s) spoken at home, then the 'we' of which Hytten and Adkins speak is 'us'. So any form of assessment of what the young can do and can not, any measure of 'child development', any expectation of 'the normal', which is based on our own assumptions coming from our own positioning, is suspect. Hytten and Adkins continue: (2001, p. 434-5). The round brackets are theirs; the square are mine.

First, how can we disrupt the normativity of whiteness, and second, how can this disruption help us to address diversity issues in predominantly white educational systems? ... We are preparing students to become teachers of other people's children ... [We] need to construct a "positive white identity" as an alternative self-image in an antiracist project. [We need] a different form of discourse about diversity issues. [This then is] whiteness not as substantive (lending itself to a booth at multicultural food fair), but as conceptual (lending itself to discussions of systems of privilege, cultural capital, and dominant interests). ... We do not use whiteness in the way of an essentialized identity that all white people have internalized, but as widely circulating discursive forms that contribute to, but do not constitute, peoples' identities and experiences in society and its institutions.

Here the exercises could be: how is whiteness apparently constituted through the samples of fieldnotes provided by the footnotes to this paper? What happens here in the Norwegian day care centre that also happens in New York centre? How does an institution of preschooling, such as day care, contribute to children's and staff's identities and experiences regarding

race? Who, in the examples of the subtext, contributes agentically to their own positively changing identity regarding difference and her own positioning? In pointing to whiteness as the key problematic, and consequently the unspoken referent in diversity discourses, Hytten and Adkins say (2001, p. 437):

A pedagogy of whiteness thus aims at exposing, studying, and disrupting the culture of power as the first step in conceptualizing educational and social practices that are empowering for all people. ... using critique to disrupt our assumptions and problematize the unjust effect of whiteness in social relations.' [Thus it is not enough to] 'frame our discussions in terms of "others," "differences," or those on the "margins," ... adding more voices of "people of color" ... being more representative of diverse experiences.

The questions are: what can we do that will be enough? Is it we who should be the doers? What is it that goes beyond; or who is it who goes beyond representation, beyond framing discussions and beyond adding voices? Here in presenting a critical theory of whiteness in education, Hytten and Adkins say (2001, p. 437):

The central impetus for the development of whiteness studies has come from nonwhite scholars, most notably feminist and postcolonial scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and Gayatri Spivak. They have called for white people to locate themselves within structures of privilege and to shift perspectives from naive notions of pluralism to understanding the ways in which unacknowledged white supremacy inhibits any authentic project for diversity.

The messages for Early Childhood Education are thus clear. I conclude with one last footnote, in which there may be a metaphor of hope.

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