

Editorial

This edition – Volume 4 Number 2 - of the International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood is marked by the diversity of its contents. As you would expect, the articles and reviews address different topics, indicating the breadth of issues that make up the contemporary early childhood field. More significant, however, is the diversity of the authors' models of childhood and the theoretical framework within which they think about young children. Your choice of model and your choice of theoretical framework determine your concerns about young children, what questions you ask about them, how you answer those questions and, therefore, what you can know about young children and the policies you develop that affect them. Choosing between different models and different theoretical frameworks can be as confusing as choosing between different breakfast cereals – so many products, so many choices! However, in each case, the solution is similar, too: choosing with intent. In the breakfast cereal example, is your intent to have a sweet breakfast or a sugar-free one; a hot breakfast or a cold one; etc.? In the case of young children, is your intent to support mainstream views about

children or to challenge them; to advocate for children or with them; to see children as individuals or as members of cultures, classes or other social groups; to see children terms of their potential or their present; etc.?

Martin Woodhead's article – ***Changing perspectives on early childhood: theory, research and policy*** – is an excellent introduction to 'choosing with intent'. It outlines four very different models of children - developmental, political/economic, social/cultural and human rights; explains each model's implications for practice and policy; and leaves the reader to decide whether and to what extent the implications of each model accord with their intent in choosing it. Four other articles in this edition present different models of young children and/or different theoretical frameworks within which to think about and learn about young children. Nicola Surtees's article - ***Difference and diversity: 'Talking the talk', 'walking the talk', and the spaces between*** – highlights the implications of a liberal/individualist model of children. Surtees argues that within liberalism, concepts of difference, diversity and

sexualities are reinforced through a developmentalist/biological model of children that assumes a 'universal' child who can be understood in isolation from their cultural or social background. Allegedly a-political, a liberal/individualist model of children privileges some social groups according to their race, class, culture, ability, age and sexuality and excludes others. Prassana Srinivasan's article - ***The inclusion of linguistic diversity in early childhood settings*** – also takes issue with a developmental model of children, this time for its association with 'milestones' in the development of linguistic ability and, therefore, of independence. Srinivasan argues that when a country declares a particular language the 'national' language and expects everyone to be proficient in it, this obviously disadvantages non-speakers of that language. Less obviously, it makes it likely that they will be regarded as 'deficient' in some way (e.g. cognitively, socially). Just as Surtees highlights the marginalizing effects of heteronormativity (i.e. the belief that heterosexuality is 'normal' and that other forms of sexuality are 'abnormal' or 'deviant'), Srinivasan argues that linguicism (i.e. attributing power and superiority to native speakers of the dominant language) creates an unequal distribution of resources and feelings of inferiority among speakers of other languages.

Muriel Bamblett's and Peter Lewis's article - ***Speaking Up Not Talking Down: Doing the 'Rights' Thing by Strengthening Culture for Indigenous Children*** – poses a 'cultural' model of children: 'Culture is central to identity and, therefore, to a sense of living in a "meaningful universe"'. Culture defines

who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value and what is important to us.' Bramblett and Lewis are concerned specifically with Indigenous Australian children who, they argue, 'grow up in a society which disrespects and demeans their culture and which ignores and denies their rights. For many Indigenous children, mainstream Australian society is an unsafe place, where the norm is to be talked down to – firstly because they are Indigenous and secondly because they are children.' Their 'cultural' model of children is radically different from the liberal/individualist model of children that Surtees criticized, in that it explains individual children's growth and development in terms of the strength of their culture: culture gives you your sense of belonging which supports resilience in the face of oppression. Kate Alexander's article, ***Gender Stereotypes in the Children's Book Council of Australia Early Childhood Award, Honour and Shortlist Books*** poses another 'non-individualist' (more positively - 'collective' or 'social') model of children. Alexander presents children in terms of their gender – itself understood as a set of institutionalised ideas and practices that is specific to a particular society, place and time. As such, gender is sensitive to the social conditions in which it is continually constructed and reconstructed. These conditions include text and images, especially when they are recognised as exemplary through awards and prizes. Alexander shows that Australian award-winning books for children are very conservative - biased in favour of males and depicting each gender in stereotyped ways, despite increases in numbers of gender-neutral characters

(which children still identified as gendered).

The remaining article - ***Aotearoa New Zealand Early Childhood Centres and Family Resilience: reconceptualising relationships*** - by Judith Duncan, Chris Bowden and Anne B. Smith differs from the others, because it presents early childhood centres within an alternative theoretical framework. Duncan et al recount a small scale study of three early childhood centres, which found that while parents –like many staff – saw ‘their’ centre as primarily child-oriented, they also relied on the staff for advice and assistance on a range of other matters, such as access to other services. These results led Duncan and her fellow-authors to suggest that centres should do more than just teach children – they should also enable and encourage families (even whole communities) to develop social networks (‘social capital’) through which to access resources. Just by posing this alternative (and calling for resources to support it), the authors offer a centre a choice: when choosing between the traditional idea of a centre and this new, ‘communitarian’ alternative, what does a centre intend its operations to achieve?

The tension between tradition and innovation runs through from Christine Chen’s review of David T. Hanson’s 2001 book, ***Exploring the Moral Heart of Teaching: Toward a Teacher’s Creed*** (New York: Teachers College Press). As Chen points out, Hanson differentiated between traditionalism (unquestioning obedience to past customs and beliefs) and a tradition of embracing learning from the past as a way to respond to contemporary concerns. The emphasis on choosing

with intent is echoed in Sharon Saitta’s review of Glenda MacNaughton’s 2005 book, ***Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies: Applying Post-structural Ideas*** (London & New York: Routledge). As Saitta points out, the book records how a group of contemporary early childhood educators-researchers ceased to reproduce the political conditions of the status quo and, instead, began to ‘deliberately practice for liberty’; and did so by displacing early childhood education’s traditional theoretical frameworks with contemporary ones such as poststructuralism and postcolonialism.

History shows that a discipline changes when its dominant paradigm is displaced by an alternative that offers a more comprehensive explanation of the issues facing that discipline. In early childhood education, positivism - in the form of developmental psychology - continues to be the dominant paradigm, with its status reinforced significantly by the enthusiastic embrace of neuro-psychology (the so-called ‘brain research’). Some form of sociology of childhood represents a strong challenge to that dominance, while other challengers – including the various ‘post-’ theories – mass menacingly at the discipline’s borders. The diversity of thinking in the contemporary early childhood field that is indicated by the contents of this edition of IJEIEC could be the precursor of a paradigm shift away from positivism, i.e. away from thinking in modernist, scientific ways about young children. However, history shows also that the status of dominant paradigm is more than just the outcome of some abstract, philosophical parlour game of ‘May the best paradigm win’, in

which the outcome depends purely on intellectual merit. Instead, a paradigm shift is very much a political affair – opposing forces are mobilised, alliances formed, battlegrounds chosen, battle enjoined. As we ‘choose with intent’ the models, theories and methods that support our goals, including our equity goals, so we must ‘choose with intent’ the paradigm/s that best encompass those models, theories and methods. For those who regard positivism as an inadequate, incomplete or inappropriate explanation of who children are and how they become, the task is to demonstrate that alternative paradigms offer better explanations associated with more equitable outcomes. In the words of the bumper sticker: ‘Subvert the dominant paradigm!’

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