

Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange



Navigating Otherness

Instead of using these provocations for 'reflection', we hope that you will use them to assist in a process of 'diffraction' that generates uncertainty and new ways of thinking.

"Donna Haraway proposes diffraction as an alternative to the well-worn metaphor of reflection. As Haraway suggests, diffraction can serve as a useful counterpoint to reflection: both are optical phenomena, but whereas reflection is about mirroring and sameness, diffraction attends to patterns of difference" (Barad, 2007, p.29).

Denunciation of division

Malaguzzi was opposed to, "a society composed of castes and sects and of a culture cut into slices, incapable and unwilling to 'begin the difficult art of interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity'" (Cagliari et al, 2016, p.367).

"We begin to see a world not made up of co-existing islands, and separate parts, of distant unique languages, but a world held in a web. Islands that are separate, but islands that belong to a great archipelago, to a great web..."

Even when we cannot see it, even when we think it does not exist, or that it is not there, the interdependence is there" (Loris Malaguzzi, personal notes, 2017).

"Common worlds is a conceptual framework developed to reconceptualise inclusion in early childhood communities. Common worlds take account of children's relations with all the others in their worlds – including the more-than-human others" (Taylor and Guigni, 2012).

"Martin urges early childhood educators to take account of the mutual relationships between children and the world around them" (Taylor, 2013, p.121).

"Relatedness is not limited to people but extends to everything in the environment: the animals, the plants, the skies, the climates, the waterways, the land and the spirits. When one part is under threat, then the whole system is also under threat" (Martin cited in Phillips and Lampert, 2005, p.29).

Difference

"Encountering differences is probably one of the strongest aspects of contemporary life. Accepting, respecting and valuing the differences in others is a great ethical choice, which is possible for every modern person. Differences are not a problem that we annul or eliminate. They are a resource and an opportunity" (Spaggiari, 2004, p.4).

Early Years Learning Framework

Instead of:

"Children have a strong sense of identity" we could reframe this.....

"Children have a right to a strong sense of identity".



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Early Years Learning Framework continued

Instead of:

Children have a strong sense of wellbeing we could reframe this.....

Children have a right to a strong sense of wellbeing.

Educability

Malaguzzi: "Educability he would say. Educating is a permanent process....

"tolerance is based on a very hypocritical form of authoritativeness. Instead the important issue is to appreciate diversity, to appreciate the concept of democracy that there is in diversity and do our utmost to be conducive to the concurrent existence of different things and exchange between them in our modus vivendi" (Cagliari et al, 2016, p. 267).

- Denunciation
- Subjectivity
- The identity of the child

Ethics of Care

How we respond to these ethical dilemmas as Tronto (1993) suggests, involves finding a relation to the Other based on responsibility and the recognition of difference...

Ethics of an Encounter

Emmanuel Levinas, 'ethics of an encounter' - contested totalities and universal sameness and based his ethics, ethics of an encounter – on the difference and unknowability of the Other. "Working with the ethics of an encounter in a pedagogy of listening requires the teacher to think about an Other whom she cannot grasp". (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 15)

In a pedagogy of listening, "one has to open oneself to Otherness – to welcome the stranger..." (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 15)

Environments that welcome

"Community in the sense of empathy, a closeness that creates bonds, that enables each group member to recognize the other and to recognize him/herself in the other. ...

Community is a form and a quality of space that fosters encounters, exchange, empathy, and reciprocity" (Ceppi & Zini, 1998, p.20.)



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Identity of the child – Image of the child

"A necessary premise for every pedagogical theory and project" (Cagliari et al, 2016, p.368).

"A prophetic pedagogy knows everything beforehand, knows everything that will happen, does not have one uncertainty....It contemplates everything and prophesies everything, sees everything to the point that it is capable of giving you recipes for little bits of actions, minute by minute, hour by hour, objective by objective, five minutes by five minutes. This is something so cowardly, so humiliating of teachers' ingenuity, a complete humiliation for children's ingenuity and potential" (Cagliari, et al., 2016, p.421-422).

Image of education

'Education is the right of all, of all children and as such is a responsibility of the community. Education is an opportunity for the growth and emancipation of the individual and the collective, it is a resource for gaining knowledge and for learning to live together, it is a meeting place where freedom, democracy and solidarity are practiced and where the value of peace is promoted.

Within the plurality of cultural, ideological, political and religious conceptions, education lives by listening, dialogue and participation; it is based on mutual respect, valuing the diversity of identities, competencies and knowledge held by each individual and therefore qualified as secular, open to exchange and co-operation' (Indications Scuole and Nidi d'infanzia of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 2009).

Otherness

Otherness occurs when one tries to grasp the Other and make them into the Same (Levinas).

Dahlberg and Moss remind us to 'treat[ing] the alterity (difference) of the other with respect, rather than trying to make the other the same" (2005).

"Early childhood settings are institutions and we need to ensure that they are places where the Other is not made into the Same, but places that embrace diversity, difference and otherness, for new possibilities and potentialities" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.2).

Foucault believed that the past and present are intimately and politically connected: and that these connections produce contested and overlapping ways of thinking and being in our world. For Foucault, we should not ignore the past if we wish to understand the present" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 147).

Othering Colleagues

- Age
- Appearance
- Disability
- Religion



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Navigating Otherness

Othering Colleagues continued

- Pedagogical beliefs and values
- Race and ethnicity
- Gender
- Food allergy
- Training and qualifications
- Family composition
- Language

Othering Families

- Social gatherings
- Enrolment and Orientation
- Cultural calendars and celebrations
- Project celebrations
- Family composition
- Language
- Socioeconomic circumstances
- Environment
- Dismissing their contributions as 'complaints' – labelling them as 'whingers'

Pedagogy of Listening

"in order to educate ourselves, we must try to understand differences rather than wanting to cancel them. This means approaching each individual in terms of his or her background and personal story, and with great sensitivity.

It means 'listening' to the differences but also listening to and accepting the changes that take place within us, which are generated by our relationships, or better, by our interactions with others.

It means letting go of any truths that we consider to be absolute, being open to doubt and giving value to negotiation as a strategy of the possible. All of this means – or more precisely, can mean – greater possibilities for us to change, but without making us feel displaced or that we have lost something (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 140).

Pedagogical documentation

...is the ideological and ethical concept of a transparent school and transparent education.... A political idea also emerges, which is that what schools do must have public visibility...



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Pedagogical documentation continued

Documentation in all its different forms also represents an extraordinary tool for dialogue, for exchange, for sharing. For Malaguzzi to see it means the possibility to discuss and to dialogue" everything with everyone" (Hoyuelos in Moss, 2007. p. 19).

Subjectivity

Each human being is a unique subject and perceives experiences and interacts in and with the world in a unique way.

"Subjectivity as a part of a culture of liberty, of democracy, of choice; he connects it with a biological and cultural right" (Cagliari et al, 2016, p.368).

When children 'other'

"Play is also the very serious business of childhood where power relations are played out in terms of 'race', class, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, age, size, skin colour ..." (Grieshaber & McHardle 2010, p. 8).

In conclusion:

Hugh Mackay in the Art of Belonging, says, "Any community we belong to –any setting where we gradually come to feel 'at home' – will make a rich contribution to the story of who we are. None of us is born a blank slate: we have too much genetic inheritance to claim such a thing. But the story that gradually unfolds on that slate is mostly written by others, not by us. We are the authors of each other's stories by the influence we have on each other" (Mackay, 2014, p.22).

Ubuntu It is often translated as, "I am because we are".

We hope that by focusing on 'otherness' tonight, the act and concept of grasping someone and trying to make them the same is has given you an opportunity to reflect on your practices for reconciliation, social justice, democracy and equity, utilising respectful relationships, listening, reciprocity and participation.

Hope for a truly shared humanity can be realised through inclusive educational contexts with and for children.
[#blacklivesmatter](#)



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Questions to critically reflect on:

- Do you have any examples of 'otherness' occurring at your educational setting?
- How do we counter 'otherness'? What kind of critical reflection practices does your setting have in place?
- As you consider the ethics of care and an ethics of an encounter, what questions might this raise for you on a personal and professional level?
- Are there practices that you may need to shift, change or let go of in order to welcome the other, to honour and respect all in our community?

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