Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange

Transforming Understandings of Agency

Quotes and Provocations

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).

What is agency?
Agency: 'Being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world' (EYLF, p.48).

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity. Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency.

National Quality Framework and Australian Curriculum
NQF - Element 1.2.3. Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions that influence events and their world.
NQF - Element 7.1.1. A statement of philosophy guides all aspects of the service's operations.
NQF - Element 7.2.1. There is an effective self-assessment and quality improvement process in place. (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), 2020).

Australian Curriculum – Giving Voice to the Impacts of Values Education (2010) found that values education led to five key impacts on student's learning:
Values consciousness, wellbeing, agency, connectedness and transformation (Education Services Australia, 2010).

Agency as an ethic
- What we should consider is that education starts with the child's image, an image that reveals a human beings indetermination.
- This rich image of the child that Malaguzzi proposes is one that interprets the child as a participant and interactive subject (Hoyeulos, 2013).

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Language
Allow?
Grant?
Contexts for children's agency to flourish?
Children's voice?
Children with agency?
Agentic children?
Shared power?
Empower?
Uphold?

Power and control
"…'everything is dangerous', the issue being not one of intent but of effect: benign motives may have unintended or even malign effects, and early childhood is no exception" (Moss, 2014, p. 95).
"… the acknowledgement of rights creates an ethical, optimistic, and supportive vision of the child; a child as a producer and not only a consumer of experiences, theories, friendships and mistakes; a child who is the main character of his or her adventure of growth" (Hoyelous, 2013, p. 288).

The role of the educator
"Listening means being open to the other and recognizing the other's differences from one's own position and experiences. It means listening to thought—the ideas and theories, questions and answers of children—and struggling to make meaning from what is said, without preconceived ideas of what is correct or valid or appropriate" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 100).

Participation
"feeling like a participant and a whole are two vital necessities for the child. These ideas provide the child with the security to communicate and to openly criticize other points of view" (Hoyuelos, 2013, p. 114).

"a process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built, and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured" (Hart, 1992, p.5).

Principles
"Progettazione the process of planning and designing the teaching and learning activities, the environment, the opportunities for participation and the professional development of the personnel, and not by means of applying a predefined curricula" (Istituzione of Reggio Emilia, 2010, p. 12).

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Children's 'interests' or engagement or?
Progettazione is a recursive process based on the following:
Hypotheses or pre-figurations
Observation
Interpretation
Documentation
Relaunch

Contexts for agency
"Meal-times
Rest time
Group times
Does this practice uphold the right of the child to exercise agency?

Principles
".."Io chi siamo" ("I am who we are"), to express the idea that it is within this shared space of "we" that each child can offer his or her best thinking, leading to a rich and fertile group exchange" (Edwards et al, 1998, p. 219).

In conclusion:

"Democratic classrooms encourage children to have a voice in matters of consequence and to engage in a process in which they consider one another's perspective in order to reach solutions.

In this context, democracy is not about individuals stating their views as loudly as they can in order to win an argument; nor is it about self-advocacy, persuasion, or majority rule. Rather, it is about creating a community that works for each individual as well as for the group—individuals coming together to listen, to learn, and to convey and create knowledge and culture.

… it involves attention to every aspect of the day—from the way children are welcomed in the morning, to the formation of classroom rules, to negotiating plans for the day in morning meeting, to engaging in long-term projects. Every moment of every day is grounded in a democratic vision" (Krechevsky et al. 2016, p.15).

"Both children and adults are entitled to be heard, to have their concerns taken into account; simultaneously, children and adults are obliged to listen to and take into account others' concerns. Individual and collective rights of children are co-implicated – children become social participants, with adult's conceived as 'protecting children's rights' rather than protecting children" (Sellers, 2013, p.75).

Questions to critically reflect on:

How do you?
- Encourage children's agency through meaningful interactions?
- Include children's perspectives?
- Work with children as co-constructors of curriculum?

How do your environments honour the agentic child, from the physical, relational, and the temporal dimensions?

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