ResearchSPAce

http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/

A 'region' under siege? singularisation, regionalisation and genericism in Early Childhood Studies in England

Jim Hordern

Bath Spa University

j.hordern@bathspa.ac.uk

A 'region' under siege? singularisation, regionalisation and genericism in Early Childhood Studies in England

Abstract

This paper draws on Bernstein's sociology of knowledge to examine the academic study of early childhood in England, involving scrutiny of how knowledge is recontextualised from contributory disciplines to take account of early childhood practice and professionalism, and of governmental influence on what counts as disciplinary and curriculum knowledge. The relatively fragmented disciplinary structure of Early Childhood Studies suggests vulnerability to attempts to control its purpose. However, this is mitigated by commitments within the academic community to traditions of early childhood practice, and a sense of advocacy and shared values. The analysis draws upon a recent investigative project undertaken at English higher education institutions.

Keywords: Early Childhood Studies; academic disciplines; professional knowledge; Bernstein

Introduction

This paper seeks to illuminate the context and trajectory of the discipline of Early Childhood Studies (ECS) in higher education in England by drawing on Bernstein's sociology of knowledge and its recent development (i.e. as seen in the work of Beck and Young (2005), Muller (2009) and Young and Muller (2014)), in addition to the wider sociology of the professions and theories of professional knowledge and expertise (i.e. Abbott 1988; Winch 2010; Beck 2008). It is argued that the discipline and its associated curriculum structures can be conceptualised by examining how influences stemming from academic and practitioner communities serve to shape forms of knowledge about early childhood, and by examining the characteristics of that knowledge and its contributory sources. Pressures towards particular disciplinary and non-disciplinary orientations (i.e. singularisation, regionalisation and genericism) are observed, and related to uncertainties about the structure and purpose of ECS knowledge, to the role of government and the nature of early childhood practice and professionalism. The analysis draws upon a research project focused on ECS and professional knowledge in England, and aims to contribute to conceptualisation of ECS as a discipline and to the ongoing development of aspects of Bernstein's sociology of knowledge to characterise knowledge structures in higher and professional education (Young and Muller 2014).

Early childhood studies in higher education in England has emerged from various traditions of research into early childhood and early childhood practice, including those that relate to the pioneering work of pedagogues and thinkers as diverse as Piaget, Froebel, Montessori and the McMillans (Cunningham 2006; Miller and Pound 2010). There are also strong connections with the particular economic and social history of the United Kingdom, with the development of movements advancing public health and the education and welfare of children, underpinned by various strands of religious and reformist conviction (Hendrick 2003). Academic disciplines such as psychology and sociology have brought specific perspectives to bear on the nature of childhood, challenging previous assumptions and illuminating different dimensions of children's learning and experiences of the world (Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt 2014). While developmental psychology is said to view children as 'objects of the process of natural development' (ibid.,120), sociological approaches have foregrounded the 'social conditions of childhood' and children's rights, or

'children's status as 'human beings' (ibid.,118). The sociology of childhood has also often suggested a view of formal education as a locus of 'adult power and control' (ibid.119), where children's rights and individuality are neglected, or suppressed, as part of a process of socialisation into the adult world.

The history of early childhood work in England is characterised by public scepticism as to the complexity of the work and a pendulum swing between political neglect and policy hyperactivity, while often marginalising academic and practitioner voices in a quest to drive through a particular 'solution' to a perceived policy 'problem' (Faulkner and Coates 2013; Moss 2014; Kingdon 1995). The social democratic nations of northern Europe have managed to build highly qualified professionalised workforces as part of long term investment in early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems that are 'integrated' to some degree with broader social welfare or educational systems (Oberhuemer et al. 2010), while the more adversarial political environment, and sceptical political culture, of England has left a workforce that is partially qualified and weakly professionalised, and a ECEC system that is weakly integrated and characterised by fragmented private provision (Penn 2014; Faulkner and Coates 2013; Hordern 2014a). According to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which is responsible for developing statements that outline the content and purpose of UK higher education programmes in different subject areas, the discipline of ECS provides a 'coherent way of understanding the development, care, education, health, well-being and upbringing of babies and young children in a social, pedagogical and policy context' (QAA 2014, 5). It thus brings together childhood-related disciplinary themes with an awareness of the socio-political frame within which early childhood practice is constituted. It could also be suggested that ECS is part of a process of advocacy for a more integrated system of 'care and education' and involved in advancing 'the recognition of the rights of children to actively participate in their world' (5).

Singulars, regions, generics

Bernstein (2000) provided a means for analysing the social organisation of knowledge by introducing the notions of singulars, regions and generics. These are socio-epistemic entities that possess different forms of social base and logic through which knowledge value is established (Beck and Young 2005; Muller 2009). Beck and Young state that 'singulars are most clearly exemplified by the traditional 'pure' academic disciplines' (2005, 185), while

Muller describes a region as 'comprised of a cluster of disciplines now come together to focus on a supervening purpose' (2009, 213). Generics, on the other hand, prioritise 'trainability' (53), flexibility and the 'perceived demands of employers' (Beck and Young 2005, 190), or, potentially, the demands of the state, and are generated without necessary reference to disciplinary knowledge (Bernstein 2000).

Singulars are characterised by a 'specialised discrete discourse with its own intellectual field of texts, practices, rules of entry', are generally protected by strong boundaries and hierarchies' (Bernstein 2000, 52), and equate to the pure disciplines of the physical sciences, social sciences and humanities (Muller 2009). In its ideal form the singular possesses a defined social base of participants with a shared identity who have full control over how knowledge is produced and recontextualised. Knowledge is valued for its contribution to the development of the discipline, for the pursuit of the truths that the discipline reveals and using the forms of 'truthfulness' deemed appropriate by the disciplinary social base (Muller 2009; Young and Muller 2007). The academic community enacts the disciplinary logic that enables the conservation and iteration of the knowledge base, supported by forms of insulation from external influence.

Regions, on the other hand, are 'constructed by recontextualising singulars into larger units which operate both in the intellectual field of disciplines and in the field of external practice' (Bernstein 2000, 52). Here recontextualisation is a process by which knowledge is selected from different disciplinary structures and 'relocated' to form a new (applied disciplinary) structure, undergoing some form of transformation (Bernstein 2000). Regions are the 'interface between the disciplines (singulars) and the technologies they make possible'(52), implying something of a balancing act between differing logics, between the demands of disciplines and those of 'the world of practice' (Beck and Young 2005, 190). The knowledge of a region needs to acknowledge criteria that emerge both from contributory disciplines and from the 'external' world of industry and occupational practice, and these criteria may emerge from concerns for the 'singular' pursuit of true knowledge or from a concern for the practical application of knowledge across a range of contexts.

A wide range of professionally and occupationally orientated fields are described as 'regions' including 'engineering, medicine, architecture' but also 'journalism, dance, sport, tourism' (Bernstein 2000, 52). The 'regionalisation' of knowledge thus concerns the constitution of

notions of knowledge value through the relations between stakeholders and therefore the dynamics of those relations become a central concern of a sociology of professional knowledge (Young and Muller 2014; Hordern 2014b). While the 'classical professions' such as medicine or architecture may enjoy relatively consensual, stable and well-defined arrangements through which disciplinary knowledge can be recontextualised from singulars to address practice problematics, other 'governmental' or 'corporate' (de) professionalising occupations may be characterised by more fluid relations and much greater uncertainty around which forms of knowledge are relevant for the concerns of occupational practice (Beck 2008; Beck and Young 2005; Muller 2009; Hordern 2014b). In occupations concerned with education, governments, employers, institutions and professional associations may have conflicting views on what aspects of professional activity are most important, or indeed of the purpose(s) of the occupation.

..

While Bernstein (2000, 52) explicitly identified professionalised occupations as a prime category for regionalised knowledge, it is also possible to examine the notion of a 'supervening purpose' (Muller 2009) in terms of a field of practice or industrial sector, implying a broader conception that extends beyond specific professional roles (Hordern 2017). Bernstein identifies 'tourism' and 'sport' as regions, and engagement with the knowledge that relates to these fields of practice may lead to a range of specific occupational roles, or to none. Similarly, the recontextualisation of knowledge from various disciplines to form a knowledge base for occupationally-orientated disciplines such as education studies or management studies can be related as much to conceptualisations of educational or management practice as to any sense of preparation for one specific professional role (Hordern 2017).

Few disciplines of whatever purpose or history remain immune to pressures to take on more 'singular' or 'regional characteristics. Advantages of greater singularity may include a strengthening of boundaries with 'external' influences, leading to a form of insulation from institutional strategies, employers or governments, in an attempt to preserve and sustain a disciplinary academic tradition. Many of the 'purer' disciplines enjoy high status in the academy, but this privileged status may be attacked for its perceived irrelevance to the world of work, as 'external constituencies' exercise their 'unprecedented pull on universities' (Shay

2015, 2). However, opportunities for a singular to 'regionalise' are limited if there is no connection between a discipline and a field of practice. A region must have a 'supervening purpose' (Muller 2009), an 'external' rationale for its existence, and where this is not present it may be difficult to meaningfully 'regionalise'. One consequence of this in higher education is the appending of purer disciplinary programmes of study with employability related modules and activities which have limited or no connection with the discipline.

For Bernstein (2000, 53) and Beck and Young (2005) it is a mode of knowledge organisation very different from singulars and regions which comprises the greatest threat to disciplinary communities and to 'academic and professional identities'. Where the knowledge demands of external stakeholders start to dominate excessively the consequence may be a marginalisation of disciplinary content (Beck and Young 2005), with space emerging which can be filled by 'generic modes' (Bernstein 2000, 53). These are forms of knowledge organisation that have resulted not from disciplines but from state actors and from the interests of the market. Generics do not share the disciplinary orientations of singulars and regions, and constitute a very different approach to knowledge (Bernstein 2000). Generics have been 'produced by a functional analysis' considered 'necessary to the performance of a skill, task, practice or even area of work' (53). This Taylorist methodology seeks to 'silence the cultural basis' (53) of professional and vocational work practices, discarding occupational traditions in the pursuit of increased 'trainability' and 'flexibility', resulting in what is described as 'short-termism…where a skill, task, area of work, undergoes continuous development, disappearance or replacement' (59). Generic modes are thus strongly allied with market and government driven demands for constant change to education and work to meet the perceived needs of the economy – the 'economics imperialism' and 'skills discourses' which pervade many Anglophone systems of general and vocational education (Allais 2012)). Moreover, generic modes, because they float free of any necessary reference to any form of 'accumulated knowledge' (Beck and Young 2005) or disciplinary or professional community, are prone to use in a highly arbitrary manner – they can be controlled directly or strongly influenced by politicians or industrial interests, and advanced as solutions to the imaginary demands of the global economy. The consequence is an undermining of the conditions that enable critical thought and civic and occupational participation (Bernstein 2000; Beck and Young 2005).

It is important to note here the different ways in which 'disciplines' and 'curricula' articulate within singulars, regions and generics. Singulars can be equated with pure disciplines (Beck and Young 2005) and therefore disciplinary processes of knowledge production and validation (i.e. research, review and the iteration of the disciplinary knowledge base), and in a pure discipline it is those who are involved in knowledge production who generally have control over how this knowledge is recontextualised into curricula (Muller 2009). However, in regions, as suggested above, there is greater potential for curricula to diverge from disciplinary knowledge, and there may be various links with disciplinary sources of that knowledge (Muller 2009). Finally, the curriculum forms that generics give rise to are non-disciplinary (Beck and Young 2005). The generic rests on a belief in the 'inevitable obsolescence of accumulated knowledge' (ibid.,191) and thus curriculum purpose is turned towards instrumental objectives championed by employers or governments.

The discipline of Education Studies provides some illustration of the tensions between singular, regional and generic modes noted above, and serves as a useful preface to the foregoing analysis of ECS. The study of education in England has a history that relates closely to changes to teacher education, and an uncertain place within an academy which regards it as an applied discipline or field that draws upon multiple disciplinary sources (Furlong 2013; Whitty 2014). The 'academic study of education', represented in programmes in education studies that have grown considerably in number over the last ten years but do not lead to qualified teacher status, can be seen as an attempt to singularise the field, and to draw more extensively on the 'foundation disciplines' of sociology, philosophy, history and psychology (Hordern 2017). In some cases education studies has been absorbed into studies of the humanities, or is hosted within faculties of social science (Whitty 2014; Furlong 2013). However, this singularisation is in tension with conceptions of education studies degrees as a route into employment in educational settings, which would suggest that education studies should be seen as a 'region' with a 'supervening purpose' that relates to teacher education, and should take account of the national context, policy and requirements of 'teacher preparation' (Tatto 2006). However, the potential for development of stronger forms of region that link closely with the development of professional or practitioner identity are confounded in England by increasing genericism (Hordern 2017). Government policy has increasingly led to the evacuation of connections with disciplinary knowledge in postgraduate teacher education (Whitty 2014), advancing the teachers standards as a 'flexible' basis for evaluation of teacher competence.

The analysis now turns to focus specifically on Early Childhood Studies, identifying how singularisation, regionalisation and genericism are impacting on forms of academic and professional knowledge within this discipline. The majority of ECS undergraduate programmes in England are taught in former Colleges of Higher Education or in former Polytechnics which have become universities since 1992, with many programmes emerging in these institutions in the 1990s (Calder 1999). In many cases ECS programmes are taught alongside, or integrated with, Education Studies programmes, often reflecting the educational orientation of the programmes. However, this is not the case for all programmes, and some programmes are taught in departments which have an orientation towards social care, general social sciences, or healthcare professions, and this may open up opportunities for a more holistic view of childhood and child development (QAA 2014).

The analysis draws on a research project focused on academic and professional knowledge in ECS involving interviews with programme leaders and lecturers at six higher education institutions in England.All of the institutions at which research was conducted were 'new' post 92 universities, but the organisational units in which the programmes were located were varied, ranging from schools or departments of education or childhood studies to schools in which education was housed with social sciences or health. Conscious of differences in how ECS is organised as detailed above, the researcher aimed to interview staff who worked in a range of department types in order to reflect the diversity of programmes offered. Interviewees were asked to participate on the basis of their expertise as experienced academics working in ECS. The researcher, on the other hand, did not have a background specifically in ECS but was knowledgeable in cognate academic fields and had worked with early childhood practitioners on professional development, and was therefore well placed to conduct expert interviews on this specialist topic.

The project was carried out with reference to the British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines in use at the time (BERA 2011), and approved by the ethics committee of the institution at which the researcher was based. All primary data was gathered in accordance with the principle of voluntary informed consent, and with the assurances that individual participants and institutions would not be identified in any publication. Participants were informed of the purpose and scope of the project and their right to withdraw from the project at any time. The project also involved document analysis of the Early Childhood

Studies benchmark statement, and other publically available documents contributing to debates on professional knowledge. The data gathered during this project was categorised and coded using the Bernsteinian concepts above using a form of 'directed content analysis' (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1281-3). This involves the development of an initial analytical frame that was then further configured and iterated as the data is interpreted to reveal the particular socio-epistemic dynamic of the discipline. Interview data is marked in the text by whether the participant was a programme leader/director of studies (PL) or senior lecturer/lecturer (SL) and by institution (A,B etc.) and interviewee number at the institution.

Early Childhood Studies as a singular

There are attractions in attempting to 'singularise' ECS, in terms of gaining status for a body of knowledge about early childhood in higher education and for demarcating the distinctiveness of higher education programmes in comparison to more 'vocational' provision of a more technical, functional or procedural nature. Elements of the disciplines of sociology, philosophy and psychology are concerned with childhood, either as part of studies of education or as part of a distinct sub-specialism within the discipline. The Early Childhood Studies Benchmark Statement identifies other contributors, such as 'social policy…and...health, history and cultural studies' (QAA 2014, 8). These disciplines are varied, with some having a more applied orientation, and consisting therefore of recontextualised knowledge from other disciplines (Muller 2009), and may therefore be difficult to reconcile in a new disciplinary context. The risk for a field such as ECS is that specific disciplinary perspectives are recontextualised into the knowledge base to the exclusion of others, with implications for how that knowledge is perceived and presented. This differs from the study of philosophy or sociology in their pure forms where a range of prominent perspectives would need to be covered as part of a standard undergraduate course. In sociology for example, it is generally deemed 'essential to appraise theories' within a disciplinary context of 'theoretical diversity' (QAA 2007, 1) – this assertion of the importance of the theoretical structure of the discipline is also demonstrated by Mclean et al. (2013, 271) in their identification of common strands of 'classical', 'political' and 'critical' sociology across undergraduate programmes. Theoretical perspectives arise often as counterpoints to existing perspectives, and recontextualising outside of a singular structure

risks losing connection with the debates that stimulate the development of fresh perspectives. The existence of different procedures of enquiry across contributory disciplines also suggests varying traditions of theoretical development through empirical corroboration, reasoning and argumentation, generating problems for the further development of ECS as a coherent and 'distinctive' field of study and research (QAA 2014, 8).

Interviewees at higher education institutions illustrated some of these tensions, by recognising both the potential insights that 'pure' disciplinary knowledge can bring, and the complex amalgam that can result when programmes become assemblages of these various knowledges. Academic staff spoke of developing graduates 'who are academic experts in their field' (PLA1) and the importance of being able to 'critique and criticise' (SLC2) within a degree framework that offered a 'transformational element' (PLC1). On the other hand there was a recognition that these disciplines can come across as a 'blend' or a 'mix', which can be 'quite challenging for students, going to the library, because they are under different headings' (PLB1). 'Blends' and 'mixes' can lack coherence if discrete elements or propositional knowledge are not brought into relation systematically (Winch 2010; Muller 2014). Singularisation of the 'blend' would also require the development of a 'foundational disciplinary core' and a 'strong academic identity' that 'binds the social to the cognitive' (Muller 2009, 214). It may be possible to develop a more singular, disciplinary, form of ECS but this would require more than just a drawing together elements of 'pure' disciplines, it would also require a coherent underpinning conceptual architecture and the development of agreed procedures for judging claims to knowledge (Winch 2010), along with communally agreed 'values' and 'standards' that can iterate these cognisant of disciplinary history and purpose (Muller 2009, 214). As philosophy, history, sociology and psychology have their own distinct disciplinary traditions and knowledge structures, and their own procedures for judging truth claims, this would be a considerable challenge.

Singularisation in ECS can, similarly to education studies, be seen as part of an attempt to cement jurisdiction of the field of study in higher education, including as a means of insulating the field from government influence and external stakeholders. However, there are difficulties with attempting to achieve this via a 'purer' more 'singular' disciplinary status. Although there may be some truth in suggesting that ECS is a 'unique' albeit 'developing' discipline (PLB1), purer disciplinary forms demand core questions and problematics that are largely internally generated and controlled by disciplinary communities, while the focus of

ECS has tended to relate to the particular social and pedagogic contexts that children experience and the role of adult practitioners within those contexts (QAA 2014). Therefore the direction of travel of the 'developing discipline' may be towards a different destination, where the 'field of texts' is not 'purely' 'intellectual', but is instead geared towards some form of external purpose (Muller 2009). This purpose could be understood in terms of how 'childhood' has become more visible as a distinct phase of life in contemporary society, and in terms of advocacy for forms of practice and understanding that secure children's well-being and 'democracy, sustainability and social justice' (QAA 2014, 8). There are parallels here with how some have viewed the development of the sociology of education, as built around a 'redemptive' view of education that has its roots in a 'project of modernity' (Dale 1992, 202), and thus may close off some problematics or approaches that do not accord with a particular world view. The field advocates a view of childhood which may or may not align well with prevailing policy or societal norms, with implications also for relations with government. Singularisation is therefore compromised if we acknowledge that ECS is part of a social project that has roots in the development of advanced industrial societies and in normative views of the relationship between children and those societies. While some traditions of ECS can be seen as a reaction against aspects of 'modernity', they are nevertheless part of that conversation and its historical progress.

Early Childhood Studies as a region: profession and practice

In a region elements of disciplines are pulled together in a recontextualisation process to meet the requirements of a profession, practice or technology (Muller 2009; Young and Muller 2014). For ECS there are clear connections with professional formation and with notions of practice. In many European countries, higher education programmes focused on early childhood lead to a professional qualification – (Oberhuemer et al. 2010), and study of early childhood is linked with the achievement of professional status. In such contexts social partnership models have historically often underpinned recontextualisation processes, with formal agreements as to the knowledge and formation processes that are appropriate for professionals (Torstendahl and Burrage 1990). Government plays a role, but in concert with educational institutions and employers. Professionalism is linked to a notion of 'licence to practice' and employment is often in either state-sponsored settings or within early childhood provision that is highly regulated (Oberhuemer et al. 2010). This contrasts with the context in England, where the fragmented context of early childhood employment (Penn 2014), the

absence of a licence to practice system and public scepticism of the complexity of early years work generate problems for the 'professional' regionalisation of the discipline in England. In essence the 'problems' and 'purposes' of professional practice are not defined consensually or formalised, enabling governments and individual employers to exercise considerable control over the definition and redefinition of notions of professionalism (Hordern 2013, 2014a).

In the classical (at least in Anglo-American terms) model of a profession it is professional associations and bodies that play a vital role in representing professional views, controlling accreditation and setting parameters for the recontextualisation of knowledge from disciplinary sources for the 'regional' knowledge base (Millerson 1964; Hordern 2014b). Early childhood professionals in England lack a 'united body' (PLB2) to advance the recontextualisation process and stipulate accreditation, and 'voices through networks and petitions…seem to be…dismissed' (PLA1), particularly by recent governments with particular visions of the role of early childhood work. However, during the New Labour period, the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), a government agency, took on something of a surrogate associative role in developing qualifications specifically for the children and young people's sector and advancing workforce reform in England. Government policy thus became the principal influence on professionalism, and therefore views of the knowledge appropriate for professional practice tended to be shaped around policy objectives rather than understandings of roles developed by professionals, or the complexity of the practice environment. Nevertheless, the development of the 'sector endorsed' model and the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) during the New Labour Government of 1997-2010 offered a degree of distinctive professional identity, at least 'distinct from teachers' (PLB2). This delineation has now been swept away by the policies of the conservative-led and conservative governments since 2010, who have concentrated on reconfiguring the role of early childhood work in terms of preparing children for school, leading to a reworking of the relationship between early years work and the more dominant profession of teaching (Hordern 2013). This has led to the introduction of Early Years Teacher Status, modelled substantively on Qualified Teacher Status for schoolteachers and increasingly subject to similar governance arrangements, but with different pathways to accreditation than teaching and no guarantee of similar payscales, workplace conditions or supported induction year (NCTL 2017; Osgood et al. 2017). In the words of one interviewee professional status is 'to be schoolified' (SLA2), but this development will not necessarily

lead to the societal recognition afforded to teachers (Hordern 2014a), and may reflect a continued ambivalence about the purpose of early childhood practice amongst policy makers in England (Moss 2017).

Alternatively, as suggested above, regionalised knowledge can develop in relation to a particular conception of 'practice' that is held by a particular community of practitioners. Distinct traditions of work with children and ways of seeing the child in relation to the world pervade interview material, with higher education staff talking of the importance of generating a 'shared appreciation…of values' (PLA1), 'visions for early childhood' (SLC2), and a 'very strong ethos of early childhood education and care' with 'children being central to the whole process' (PLD1). Particularly instructive is the assertion that for those 'people who are really committed to Early Childhood Studies….there is an inspirational figure of some kind' (PLC1), a sense of sharing in an 'evangelical' approach (PLC1). Supporting students to 'articulate those values' and, if necessary 'to subvert…with confidence' the policy frameworks (PLA1) is seen as a vital element of ECS. Part of this also concerns 'fighting for that recognition' and being 'real advocates' for 'something that is specialised' (PLD1). This suggest that higher education staff perceive themselves and their students as members of a practice community which has a normative vision based around core tenets that relate to the role of children in the world, a vision of practice that has forms of 'praxis' and advocacy at its heart. This accords with the assertion that a core purpose of ECS degrees is to provide graduates who are 'effective advocates for babies and young children' within 'an expanded provision of integrated care and education for children from birth' (QAA 2014, 5), even if that expansion and integration remains substantially incomplete (Moss 2014). This 'practice-orientated' region can be said to draw on elements of psychology and sociology, including through the work of 'key figures' in ECS.

ECS in England also draws on wider European early childhood traditions, such as Reggio Emilia (SLC2), and emphasises the opportunities to 'experience early childhood in a different country' (PLA1). This engagement with international influences illuminates the existence in England of particular social and political circumstances that provide challenge to the values upheld by this practice. These challenges can be seen in the low esteem in which early childhood work has been held by many post-war governments (Moss 2014), the centring of a school readiness agenda (i.e. via the Early Years Teachers' Standards and Early Years Foundation Stage – (BERA/TACTYC 2014)) which positions early years work as somehow

subservient to schooling, and the fact that early childhood academics questioning policy are routinely 'ignored' (SLA2) by politicians. This results in a separation between the normative practice values and notions of professionalism, which in England as noted above are shaped by 'governmental' formulations.

Generic pressures

ECS in England is also strongly influenced by generic modes, particularly as a consequence of what is expected of early childhood practitioners by the public and the government. For one lecturer there is some 'confusion within the student body, never mind the outside world, around exactly what the degree is for, whether its vocational or not' (SLA2) and this is related to issues that are 'very much embedded within society around what it means to work with young children' (PLA1). The notion of an agreed purpose to programmes in ECS is also challenged by the multiplicity of 'discourses in the early years' (SLC2), revolving around 'mothering' (SLC2) and low status 'caring' occupational roles. An underlying 'perception of the role' is commonplace in public thinking, one that suggests that 'actually you don't need a lot of qualifications - you just need to be kind' (SLA2) or that 'anybody could do it' and 'it didn't necessitate…much intelligence' (SLD2). These beliefs can be said to have origins in the social history of childhood and the family in England and ways of viewing children and their rights (Hendrick 2003), and also in reservations about the 'welfare professions' and the disciplinary thinking they invoke as justification for professional action. It can also be argued that there is a 'danger in professionalising' in that important aspects of day to day direct practice with children can be seen as 'second place' (SLC2), relegated to a type of work that is deemed to be unprofessional. This public scepticism about the specialisation and complexity involved in early childhood work has arguably made it easier for politicians to disregard the voices of early childhood academics and practitioners and implement reforms to qualifications and curricula, and indeed the wider early years system without substantive consultation.

Bernstein's (2000) notion of the generic stems from functional analysis of work practices rather than disciplinary knowledge. A key aspect of the realisation of the generic in education is that evaluation of 'performance' is extricated from disciplinary referents, and located with whoever can assume control of the mode, which may well be governments and employers

(Beck and Young 2005). The notion of the professional or disciplinary 'adept' (Muller 2009) immersed in a body of knowledge controlled by a disciplined professional association becomes redundant. Standards based approaches to professional competence can be useful tools for generic modes if controlled by governments, in that accreditation of competence can be orientated towards the behaviours that align with policy objectives. The development of the early years teachers' standards (EYTS) (NCTL 2013) can be seen in this vein, both though the specification of standards taking little account of the arguments of the early years academic and practitioner community (TACTYC 2013) and by overtly aligning early years practice with, and partially subjugating it to, dominant models of teaching. The use of a similar structure and format as the Teaching Standards for qualified teachers status (DfE 2011), and the foregrounding of checks on progress and school readiness (NCTL 2013, 6-8), undermines the distinctiveness of an early years professional and practice tradition and identity.

While some within higher education institutions may have some reservations concerning the EYTS, interviewees stated that they were 'always mindful of the requirements' of the standards and that they were 'woven in to our programme' as a means of supporting students to meet 'professional requirements' (SLD2). This may be a pragmatic approach, which recognises the need to 'have to regard current policy' (SLD2). However, governmental policies towards early years education have objectives relating to increasing female participation in the workforce and encouraging school-readiness that come into tension with the intellectual and practice traditions of early years education that are 'more about how schools are ready for children, rather than children ready for schools' (PLD1). This interviewee's foregrounding of a holistic approach to children's development, emphasising nurture, individuality and diversity of needs, can be seen as threatened by the greater alignment of early years work with schooling, but also reflects ongoing struggles with public perceptions(Osgood et al. 2017; Hendrick 2003).

In many occupationally-orientated areas of higher education there are commitments to engage employers in shaping curricula, and workplace experience is an important element of many programmes. In the early years sector in England, however, it is questionable whether the existing employment structure provides the opportunities, or has the expertise, to adequately contribute to the formation of early childhood practitioners (Hordern 2013). The sector in England is particularly privatised and fragmented in comparison with other

European nations (Penn 2013), characterised by multiple settings of various sizes, and containing managers and leaders who sometimes lack appropriate levels of qualification (Moss 2014; Faulkner and Coates 2013; Oberhuemer et al. 2010). Some early years employers may have cause, therefore, to encourage higher education programmes to focus increasingly on functional aspects of early years work and on preparing practitioners to manage current inspection requirements, rather than making space within the curriculum to critically engage with alternative perspectives on early childhood policy and pedagogy.

Concluding remarks

Early Childhood Studies in England is subject to pressures to singularise, regionalise and genericse, with influence felt from higher education institutions, government, and a strong tradition of early childhood practice. In the current context there is a tension that has opened up between the requirements of professionalism, which are here infected with non-disciplinary generic modes emanating from government, and widely held views in the academic and practitioner community regarding the nature and value of early childhood. These are tensions that were less evident in the New Labour period, with interviewees remarking on the way that government policy had 'pulled the early years sector together' (SLC2) in ways that 'made such progress' (SLC2), despite reservations about the 'drivers behind' (PLB1) that process. It can be argued, nevertheless, that the professionalism that was generated during the New Labour period contained within it inevitable tensions with traditions of early childhood practice, and was thus always hindered by a lack of commitment to the development of the necessary resources of knowledge and social organisation which are required for maintaining occupational jurisdiction and developing professional trust (Abbott 1988).

One possible strategy for ECS in England would be to 'singularise', to 'academicise' the field and to seek shelter within higher education institutions, a strategy attempted by some forms of education studies, as discussed above. However, such an approach can only ever be partially successful, as the problematic of ECS is shaped as much externally as internally, and requires the recontextualisation of multiple disciplinary sources to adequately resource and illuminate that problematic. Thus ECS can perhaps be best conceived as 'region', but in what vein? Beck's (2008) analysis of governmental professionalism in teaching in England reveals how governments can compromise the traditions and values of a professional occupation,

where the infrastructure is not in place to resist ideological policy advances. The same holds true for ECS, although in England this professional community has never held the status that teachers once had. While an infrastructure appropriate to a professional region may eventually emerge, it will need to relate to, and engage with, the strong values and intellectual traditions held dear by the early years academic and practitioner community. There is a strong argument for existing values being placed at the centre of that emerging professional-practice relation, and ECS therefore more explicitly self-identifying as serving a 'values-based welfare profession' or 'practice' with a conception of childhood in society that can be robustly defended through the production of (applied) disciplinary knowledge. In such circumstances the region could be better placed to resist the siege of generic pressures from governments with views of the purpose of practice which differ from those of practitioners. All 'regions' need a worldly purpose (Muller 2009), and for ECS that purpose involves advocacy for a particular conception of education and care that is seen as appropriate to the development of young children, suggesting a disciplinary character distinct from that of more 'singular' pure disciplines.

Acknowledgements

References

Abbott, A. 1988. *The system of professions: an essay on the division of expert labour*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Allais, S. 2012. "Economics Imperialism', education policy and educational theory." *Journal of Education Policy* 27 (2): 253-274.

Beck, J. 2008. "Governmental professionalism: re-professionalising or de-professionalising teachers in England." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 56 (2): 119-143.

Beck, J. and M. Young. 2005. "The assault on the professions and the restructuring of academic and professional identities: a Bernsteinian analysis." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 26 (2): 183-197.

Bernstein, B. 2000. *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity*. 2nd edn. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

British Educational Research Association 2011. *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. London: BERA.

Calder, P. 1999. "The development of early childhood studies degrees in Britain: Future prospects." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 7 (1): 45-67.

Cunningham, P. 2006. "Early years teachers and the influence of Piaget: evidence from oral history." *Early Years* 26 (1): 5-16.

Dale, R. 1992. "Recovering from a pyrrhic victory? Quality, relevance and impact in the sociology of education." In. *Voicing concerns: sociological perspectives on contemporary education reforms*, edited by Arnot, M. and L. Barton, 201-217. Wallingford: Triangle.

Department for Education (DfE). 2011. *Teachers' Standards*. London: DfE.

Early Childhood Studies Degree Network (ECSDN). n.d. History of the network. http://www.ecsdn.org/history/

Faulkner, D. and E, Coates. 2013. "Early childhood policy and practice in England: twenty years of change." *International Journal of Early Years Education* 21 (2-3): 244-263.

Furlong, J. 2013. *Education: an anatomy of the discipline. Rescuing the university project*. London: Routledge.

Hendrick, H. 2003. *Child welfare: historical dimensions, contemporary debate*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Hordern, J. 2013. "A productive system of early years professional development." *Early Years* 33 (2): 106-118.

Hordern, J. 2014a. "Knowledge, practice and the shaping of early childhood professionalism." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. DOI:10.1080/1350293X.2014.975939

Hordern, J. 2014b. "Regions and their relations: sustaining authoritative professional knowledge." *Journal of Education and Work.* DOI:10.1080/13639080.2014.958653

Hordern, J. 2017. "Bernstein's sociology of knowledge and education (al) studies." In *Knowledge and the Study of Education: an international exploration,* edited by G.Whitty and J. Furlong, 191-210. Didcot: Symposium.

Hsieh, H-F., and S. Shannon. 2005. "Three approaches to qualitative content analysis." *Qualitative Health Research* 15 (9): 1277-1288.

Kingdon, J. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*. New York: Harper Collins.

McLean, M., Abbas, A. and P. Ashwin. 2013. "The use and value of Bernstein's work in studying (in)equalities in undergraduate social science education." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34 (2): 262-280.

Miller, L. and L. Pound. 2010. *Theories and approaches to learning in the early years*. London: Sage.

Millerson, G. 1964. *The qualifying associations: a study in professionalization*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Muller, J. 2009. "Forms of knowledge and curriculum coherence." *Journal of Education and Work* 22 (3): 205–26.

Muller, J. 2014 "Every picture tells a story: Epistemological access and knowledge." *Education as Change* 18 (2): 255-269.

Moss, P. 2014. "Early childhood policy in England 1997–2013: anatomy of a missed opportunity.*" International Journal of Early Years Education* 22 (4): 346-358.

Moss, P. 2017. "What place for "care" in early childhood policy?" In *The SAGE Handbook of Early Childhood Policy*, edited by L.Miller, C.Cameron, C.Dalli and N.Barbour, 256-267. London: Sage.

National College for Teaching and Leadership. 2013. *Early Years Teachers' Standards* (EYTS) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211646/Early_ Years_Teachers__Standards.pdf

Oberhuemer, P., Schreyer, I. and M. Neumann. 2010. *Professionals in early childhood education and care systems: European profiles and perspectives*. Farmington Hills: Barbara Budrich

Osgood, J., Elwick, A., Robertson, L., Sakr, M., and D. Wilson. 2017. *Early Years Training and Qualifications in England: Issues for policy and practice.* TATYC Occasional paper 9. http://tactyc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Occasional-Paper-9-V5-PDF.pdf

Penn, H. 2014. "The business of childcare in Europe." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 22 (4):432-456.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). 2007. *Subject Benchmark Statement: Sociology*. Gloucester: QAA. http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Subject-benchmark-statement-Sociology.pdf

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). 2014. *Subject Benchmark Statement: Early Childhood Studies*. Gloucester: QAA. http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/SBS-early-childhood-studies-14.pdf

Quennerstedt, A. and Quennerstedt, M. 2014. "Researching children's rights in education: sociology of childhood encountering educational theory." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 35 (1): 115-132.

Shay, S. 2015. "Curricula at the boundaries." *Higher Education*. DOI: 10.1007/s10734-015-9917-3

TACTYC. 2013. TACTYC response to the Teachers' Standards (Early Years). http://tactyc.org.uk/pdfs/Teacher's%20Standards.pdf

Tatto, M. 2006. "Education reform and the global regulation of teachers' education, development and work: A cross-cultural analysis." *International Journal of Educational Research* 45 (4-5): 231-241.

Torstendahl, R. and M. Burrage. (Eds.) (1990) *The formation of professions: knowledge state and strategy*. London: Sage.

Whitty, G. 2014. "Recent developments in teacher training and their consequences for the 'University Project' in education." *Oxford Review of Education* 40 (4): 466-481.

Winch, C. 2010. *Dimensions of Expertise: A conceptual exploration of vocational knowledge*. London: Continuum.

Young, M. and J. Muller. 2007. "Truth and truthfulness in the sociology of educational knowledge." *Theory & Research in Education* 5 (2): 173 – 201.

Young, M. and Muller, J. 2014. "Towards the Sociology of Professional Knowledge." In *Knowledge, expertise and the professions*, edited by Young, M. and J. Muller, 3-17. Abingdon: Routledge.