Paper Abstract_Turner

Conference strand: Early childhood education for the future: creativity and innovation.

Title: Envisaging Quality as a Process of Inquiry for Early Childhood Communities

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Internationally the field of early childhood education and care places a focus on the quality of the service provision for children. Access to quality early childhood education and care for all children and families is foundational in improving health, cognitive and socio-emotional development and strengthening children's lifelong learning (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004). The definitions and criteria of quality however has increasing become associated with a sense of 'taken-for-grantedness' across the sector permitting the standardization of quality across cultures, communities and/or early childhood programs (Duhn & Grieshaber, 2016). Accreditation practices adopted in many countries perpetuate the taken-for-granted view through the application of procedures that focus on two dimensions; the process dimension which interrogates the service environment as experienced by children and the structural dimension which places the spotlight on measurable aspects such as qualifications and ratios. Quality when viewed from this current global perspective marginalises many possibilities of alternate energies and forces and enables the growth of the audit society (Power, 1999). Moss (2016) describes the problem with quality as stemming from its being "saturated with values and assumptions" and "a technology of normalization" (pg. 10). This technology of normalization provides no sense of how quality can be identified across the many varieties of space and place.

Rather than accepting standardised criteria of quality as objective realities to adhere to, implement and evaluate accordingly, this paper addresses the post-foundationalist challenge issued by Moss (2016) by asking, could 'quality' be interrogated through a process of inquiry within early childhood education and care communities bounded by existing quality standards? A place for an inquiry as quality will suit the inquirers permitting structure and direction for the inquiry process to develop. Spaces which fulfil the needs of all in the educational and care community will emerge. It is proposed that in an inquiry as quality, structure can be provided using what Sumara and Davis (1997) call 'commonplace locations'. That is, an inquiry as quality emerges directly out of personal experience and critical reflection, and is embedded in theoretical discourse where structure is provided by theory. It is argued that an inquiry as quality would begin by developing an understanding of the varied and layered contexts in which education and care, teaching and learning with children and their families takes place. As the inquiry group moves through inquiry as quality critical conversations about the discourse of teaching and learning would emerge in a way that opens up opportunities for educators, caregivers and pre-service educators to discuss new languages and constructions that come out of their discussions rather than dominant disciplines or capitalist fads (Cannella, 1997). It is anticipated that the discussion invoked by this paper around inquiry as quality will promote thinking around practices for diversity, equity and sustainability in the early childhood education and care field.

SIG Presentation question:

What possibilities are offered through an inquiry as quality to move current thinking away from traditional perspectives of quality and create innovative approaches across early childhood education and care?

Reference list

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