CROSSING BORDERS AND BLURRING BOUNDARIES: EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTICE IN A NON-WESTERN SETTING

Trish Lewis, Kym Macfarlane, Karen Nobel and Amy Stephenson

SUMMARY

This paper examines the educational and epistemological implications for early childhood practitioners who work in non-Western environments. Predominantly, early childhood knowledge is strongly driven by the metanarrative of child development, which can prove problematic for practitioners working in non-Western settings. Practitioners who draw their knowledge from the strong Western tradition of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) often find themselves ill equipped when placed in environments that do not embrace these principles. In these settings it is often necessary for practitioners to 'think otherwise' about early childhood practice if they are to enhance the development of the young children for whom they are responsible.

The authors argue for a review of unconditional adherence to DAP in these situations, by using a case study of a student practicum in the Bachelor of Human Services: Child and Family Studies program. This practicum took place in Cambodia in 2001, where a third year student in her final placement was involved in planning programs for young children who were rescued from child trafficking in Thailand and placed in Cambodian reception centres.

Poststructuralist theory provides a useful lens for analysing how fundamental 'truths', such as the metanarrative of child development, work to hinder the practice of early childhood practitioners in non-Western settings. The authors argue that by abandoning unconditional adherence to this metanarrative and adopting alternative constructions of childhood and practice, practitioners are more able to respond effectively to children in context. Implications for early childhood education and knowledge generation are presented.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore les implications éducationnelles et épistémologiques pour les praticiens de la petite enfance qui travaillent dans des environnements non-occidentaux. D'une manière prédominante, la connaissance en petite enfance est fortement dirigée par le méta-narratif du développement de l'enfant, ce qui peut s'avérer problématique pour les praticiens en contextes non-occidentaux. Les praticiens qui tirent leurs connaissances de la forte tradition occidentale des pratiques développementales appropriées (Developmentally Appropriate Practice-DAP), se trouvent souvent fort mal équipés lorsqu'ils sont placés dans des environnements qui n'adhèrent pas à ces grands principes. Dans ces conditions, il est souvent nécessaire que les professionnels commencent à «penser autrement» à propos de leur pratique en petite enfance lorsqu'ils ont à enrichir le développement des jeunes enfants dont ils sont responsables.

Les auteurs réclament que l'on revoit l'adhésion inconditionnelle aux DAP dans ces situations, en menant une étude de cas sur un stage du baccalauréat en services sociaux (IUP 'Carrières sociales') : Programme d'études sur l'enfance et la famille. Ce stage se déroule au Cambodge en 2001 : durant son dernier stage, un(e) étudiant(e) de 3^{ème} année était impliqué(e) dans la planification de programmes pour enfants sauvés du trafic d'enfants en Thaïlande et placés dans des centres d'accueil cambodgiens.

La théorie post-structuraliste procure une vision utile pour analyser comment des 'vérités' fondamentales, telles que le méta-narratif du développement de l'enfant, s'exercent à retarder les pratiques des professionnels

dans des milieux non-occidentaux. Les auteurs soutiennent qu'en abandonnant une adhésion inconditionnelle à ce méta-narratif et en adoptant des conceptions de l'enfance et des pratiques éducatives alternatives, les praticiens sont plus à même de répondre de manière efficace à l'enfant dans son contexte. Les implications pour l'éducation de la petite enfance et la génération du savoir sont présentées.

RESUMEN

Este estudio examina las implicaciones educacionales y epistemológicas para profesionales de educación pre-escolar quienes trabajan en ambientes que no son occidentales. Para ello se llevó a cabo un estudio de caso. La investigadora conversa con la docente sujeto del estudio, acerca de sus prácticas y los problemas que encara en relación con sus competencias culturales y educativas. Los desafíos que ella encuentra están referidos a los recursos, la seguridad y el racismo. Pero también llega a ser evidente que sus creencias, largamente sostenidas, sobre las prácticas tradicionales de la Educación Preescolar pueden ser inadecuadas cuando buscamos implementar programas efectivos para niños y familias de sociedades no occidentales. En gran medida, el conocimiento en el área de educación infantil está dirigido por la 'metanarrativa' del desarrollo infantil de acuerdo con la fuerte tradición de occidente de la 'práctica adecuada al desarrollo [Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)]'. Profesionales occidentales se pueden encontrar mal preparados y dispuestos cuando están en ambientes donde no se aceptan estos principios. Puede ser necesario 'pensar de otra manera' en cuanto a la práctica para realzar el desarrollo de los niños/as que uno enseña.

Las autoras razonan que se debe hacer una crítica de la adherencia incondicional a los principios de DAP en tales situaciones. Examinan un caso de la práctica de magisterio de estudiantes en un programa de bachillerato de servicios humanos: estudios de niños y familias (Bachelor of Human Services: Child and Family Studies). Esta práctica de magisterio, la última de una estudiante en su tercer año de estudios, fue hecha en Cambodia en el año 2001. Estaba dirigida a diseñar programas educativos para niños/as que habían sido rescatados del tráfico ilegal de niños/as en Tailandia y colocados en centros de recepción en Cambodia.

La teoría 'pos-estructural' ofrece un lente útil para analizar como las 'verdades fundamentales', tales como la metanarrativa del desarrollo infantil, impiden el trabajo de los profesionales en ambientes orientales. Las autoras proponen que uno debe abandonar la adherencia estricta a esta metanarrativa y adoptar otros conceptos de la niñez para que se pueda responder efectivamente a niños/as en tales ambientes. Implicaciones para la educación infantil y para la generación del conocimiento son presentados.

KEYWORDS: Child trafficking, Developmentally appropriate practice, Epistemological, Meta-narrative, Poststructuralist theory, Think otherwise

INTRODUCTION

Recently, it has been argued that early childhood practice suffers from delimited understanding due to the fact that the early childhood education and care (ECEC) field is dominated by meta-narratives underpinned by psychologically-based discourses such as developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). As Moss (2002) argues, the ECEC field is dominated by "an Anglo-American narrative spoken in the English language, located in a [neo] liberal political and economic context, and dominated by certain disciplinary perspectives" (p.435) allowing a regime of truth (Foucault, 1980) about childhood as a redemptive vehicle for social stability and economic progress. Such predominantly westernized approaches often fail to consider the differences in how children and childhood

are conceptualized in other cultures and how western psychological approaches do not necessarily transcend borders. If ECEC professionals are to undertake important work such as that which is related to working in developing non-western settings, then these professionals must not be limited in their training by meta-narrative approaches that do not take multiple understandings of children and childhood into account.

As authors of this paper, we acknowledge Moss's (2002) perspective and are cognizant of significant argument that exists across the ECEC sector, asking for a stronger focus on application of socio-cultural theory to practice (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2002; Fleeer, 2000; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Jenks, 1996b). This article takes such a notion on board, arguing that to privilege a socio-cultural approach to practice, practitioners require a strong sense of justice (Noble, Macfarlane & Cartmel, in press). This strong sense of justice represents more than a social justice framework to practice. A strong sense of justice is produced through an ability to take note of multiple perspectives when deconstructing the practice context (Noble, Macfarlane, & Cartmel, in press). To do so, poststructuralist theory and its strategies of deconstruction, problematisation, reconceptualisation and thinking otherwise, allows space for such a sense of justice to exist, to be applied and to subsequently guide practice (Noble, Macfarlane & Cartmel, in press).

In this paper, the authors have undertaken to unpack the interview transcripts that form the data set, according to the above-mentioned understandings and strategies. To do so, we acknowledge that the use of poststructuralist theory produces conditions of possibility for multiple readings of such data. In this instance, however, we have chosen to follow a particular line of investigation, focusing on the development and/or limitation of a strong sense of justice and its importance to practice. We argue that such a notion and the ability to apply this understanding to practice is an imperative skill if practitioners are to truly privilege a socio-cultural approach to practice.

At the centre of this discussion, is a particular student undertaking practicum in a non-western setting during her undergraduate program of study. At Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, the School of Human Services provides a three-year Bachelor of Human Services undergraduate degree program, along with the Bachelor of Human Services (Child and Family Studies). Students who undertake these programs are exposed to a variety of disciplines that provide them with multiple conceptualizations relating to practice across the field of human services. As such, potential graduates are less likely to be limited by particular meta-narratives, as the ethos of the programs is underpinned by substantial theoretical critique due to its multidisciplinary nature. Thus, students are challenged to move beyond notions of social justice to form a strong sense of justice about how to work with children and families in multiple contexts.

Both of these degree programs require students to undertake a 52-day practicum placement with a human services organization, in which students are

afforded the opportunity to explore these multidisciplinary contexts and approaches in practice settings. The Child and Family Studies student, at the centre of this paper, is Amy, who undertook placement at the Battambang Reception Centre in Cambodia. Amy wished to extend her experience and practice opportunities to enable her to effectively work with children from other cultures, who were less advantaged. An examination of Amy's experience will highlight the ways in which traditional ECEC practice frameworks work to limit the professional's ability to effectively engage and plan appropriate experiences for children and families in such contexts, i.e., limit the development and application of a strong sense of justice.

LOCALE

The Battambang Reception Centre housed children who had been involved in child trafficking and begging in Thailand. Prior to the opening of the Reception Centre and the intervention program's conception, these children had been 'dumped' in Cambodia at the border and left to fend for themselves. Since the intervention program's conception, these disadvantaged children have been placed in transit centres across Cambodia. Such centres operate with a mission to restore the dignity of these disadvantaged children. Battambang is one example of a centre operating within this mission. Upon learning of the program's existence, Amy was eager to participate in a human service organization of this nature.

AMY'S PROJECT

It was necessary from the outset for Amy to explore a range of theoretical frameworks in order to underpin her practice with sound judgment and allow her to work effectively with this particular group of disadvantaged children. Amy's background had been in ECEC practice settings. As the director of a child care centre in Queensland, Amy's foundational knowledge was largely produced by psychological discourses, particularly those of DAP. Thus, even though Amy's current training was informed by a variety of approaches, her initial work with young children and their families in this new context was also underpinned by previous understandings (Foucault, 1980). Supported by her knowledge of DAP, Amy had come to understand the importance of observation, interpretation and evaluation i.e., the necessity of placing children under the psychological gaze (Tyler, 1993) in order to understand what processes were necessary to ensure that the children that she was to work with would become "better" children (Tyler, 1993). Consequently, Amy initially tried hard to displace her knowledge into Cambodia and her work with young children at Battambang Reception Centre. This is illustrated by her following comments.

Trish: Was what you tried to do based on what you had learned in early childhood and your previous experience?

Amy: After doing the program (Bachelor of Human Services – Child and Family Studies) I would link everything that I learned back to the practical stuff that I had known and tried to put it together into an ECEC framework. Also, instead of looking at each child individually, I used a more collective approach in terms of prioritizing needs. They just needed so many things. It was a huge change from the way that I was taught to respond to children.

It is apparent from Amy's comment that her previous production as an ECEC practitioner still strongly produced her practice, signaling the strength of purpose that meta-narratives can produce (Foucault, 1980; 1991). Amy's ideology of ECEC worked to produce her practice, in that she had taken on board the discourses of ECEC underpinned by psychologically based meta-narratives (Foucault, 1980; 1991). Amy's subjectivity was so strongly produced by these meta-narratives that she adopted the philosophy of such approaches as constituting her own particular approach to practice. As Althusser (1971) states, while an individual recognizes herself as a subject of the ideology, this is also a mis-recognition, as she sees herself as the author of the ideology. However, what was actually occurring was that Amy was produced by the discourses of ECEC and as such saw certain forms of practice as ideologically or fundamentally 'true' (Foucault, 1980). Moreover, as such discourses, in turn, privilege particular constructions of childhood, Amy approached her practice with children in such a way as to privilege particular methods of practice as proper. In this way, Amy adhered to fundamental 'truths' of ECEC, which in turn produced her to understand proper practice as observing, evaluating and categorizing children in particular ways (Tyler, 1993).

Amy's new understanding allowed her to see the necessity to change the whole idea of utilizing an individual approach inherent in DAP ECEC settings. (Bredekemp & Copple, 1996; Dockett & Fleer, 1999; Fleer, 2000; Tyler, 1993). As Weedon (1998) states, the humanist psychological discourse "presupposes an essence at the heart of an individual which is unique, fixed and coherent which makes her what she is" (p. 32). Thus, to make this intellectual shift, Amy needed to draw on the multidisciplinary rhetoric from her human services degree to inform her practice in order to work effectively with these children and their families. Thus, it became obvious to Amy that it was necessary to move outside of traditional understandings of childhood and early childhood practice so that necessary responses were possible. Furthermore, the romantic notions that underpin traditional ECEC approaches were not enough to sustain Amy in this new context (Sumsion, 2003).

Amy: I had this idea that I would go there, take observations and look at areas that I could assist them in and build them up and take a developmental approach, but it just didn't quite work like that. I expected to go over there and make a difference, not on a wide level but for individual children – that I could make a difference in their lives. I thought I could make coming in to this Reception Centre fun, to give them an opportunity to play and a whole range of other things.

Amy's comment indicates that her previous understandings and notions of effective practice did not sufficiently meet the needs of the children with whom she was working. However, the interdisciplinary nature of her new undergraduate degree program allowed Amy to explore a number of different frameworks from human service practice, as well as traditional early childhood education and care (ECEC) practice. Amy found that she had to use her knowledge of community development, gained through the human service component of her degree program. Clearly had Amy only undertaken to approach her work at Battambang from only a traditional ECEC perspective, she may have found it difficult to find a framework that was of assistance to her in this particular situation (Moss, 2003). The fact that Amy had human services training allowed her to be less governed by the discourses of ECEC and instead provided her the opportunity to use multiple solutions. Amy used *sustainability* and *capacity building* as her framework (Ingamells, 2001). Such a framework allowed her to more effectively fulfill her role in this practicum environment, which involved provision of sustainable resources and skill training.

Amy: There were these big empty rooms of nothing – there was not even furniture okay. Yep. The schoolroom had some furniture, but it was kept locked and the children were only in there during school hours. Um, there were large open spaces and rooms just full of nothing. Yeah and I couldn't work out whether there was toys or where they were you know the initial stuff – Children actually they ah well some of them had thongs and most of them were odd would actually play these games with their thongs and they would bet on them and they would bet um cigarettes yeah on these thong games. Actually to watch it looked similar to bowls (laughs) so it was actually quite interesting Um yeah it wasn't until a bit more exploration of the Centre that I discovered that in a locked room there was toys but that these toys had been locked away because children were selling them over the fence. (Laughs) you know you would look over the fence and see 'Oh there's a neighbourhood child and they have got our ball' and you know the children would sell it for money or cigarettes or whatever – Yes that's where they got the cigarettes from, which then formed its own little currency.

Trish: How old were these children?

Amy: These children – the smokers were anywhere from ten to eighteen. Yeah – so the toys had been locked away and you would talk to the staff and they would say 'Oh no we don't let them have the toys because they just sell them'. And it was true because the second you would let the toys out you know they would just vanish...the value wasn't in playing with them the value was in what they could get for money.

Trish: Did that change?

Amy: Yes it did change

Trish: Why?

Amy: Um we just – a lot of the problem was there wasn't enough to 'go round' okay – so we ah, got a lot of stuff donated and bought into the Centre and basically we also got a locked trunk and because of the way that the – well –

'miniculture' worked the eldest boys were in charge of everything so we gave – well – I gave, the eldest Vietnamese child a key to the trunk and the eldest Khmer boy a key to the trunk okay um so ah we made them – or – I made them responsible for gathering the toys and bringing them back in every day okay so because it wasn't adult imposed it actually worked better and those boys actually well felt responsible for something and the other children didn't sell them. It was bizarre how it worked. Actually the toys came back into the box in better condition to what they went out in. They'd wash the soccer balls and all of the Frisbees would be clean, so it was actually very interesting how it worked.

Here Amy illustrates how she combined the different disciplinary approaches to find an effective response to the children's issues. Amy was able to use a problematising approach to develop strategies to allow the children to acquire more resources. Amy did not refuse the child-centred philosophy, inherent in traditional ECEC practice, to assist her to develop strategies. She decided to use a method that was managed by the children, rather than by her. In this way she negotiated the rules with the children to improve results for them. However, Amy also used 'thinking otherwise' (Foucault, 1984; McWilliam, 1987) as a means of understanding the problem. She did not allow preconceived or romantic notions to delimit her practice (Sumsion, 2003). Rather, she thought 'outside the box' and allowed multiple perspectives to guide her decisions. Additionally, she worked within the context of Battambang rather than trying to fit Western ideas into non-Western settings.

What is apparent here is that Amy's use of multiple strategies and understandings is both produced by and is producing, the beginning of an ability to form a strong sense of justice in her practice. Because Amy was not allowing her practice to be constrained by westernized understanding, she was better able to move towards underpinning her practice with aspects of socio-cultural theory. This process is being informed by a knowledge of multiple disciplinary approaches, coupled with strategies of post-structuralism, in this case, problematisation and thinking otherwise. It is the employment of such strategies, as well as the variety in disciplinary approaches to practice, that allows the development of a strong sense of justice to be possible in this instance.

PROBLEMATISING AND 'THINKING OTHERWISE' – ISSUES

This ability to 'think otherwise' (Foucault, 1984; McWilliam, 1987) was a direct benefit to Amy during her time at Battambang. The necessity to understand how to think otherwise is a fundamental component inherent in the Child and Family Studies program at Griffith University. The development of this particular skill created the conditions of possibility for Amy to problematise (Foucault, 1983; Meredyth & Tyler, 1993) natural truths that were part of her early practice in western settings, instead developing new methods of conceptualizing practice. This process is evident in relation to Amy's response to the situation at Battambang.

As a direct consequence of the children's past experiences as beggars and victims of child trafficking, these children at Battambang Reception Centre were attention starved. Consequently, they responded to any attention that they received, whether positive or negative. The program demanded such attention by the practitioners, that there was very little time for a variety of observational data to be gathered and analyzed. Rather, children could only be observed at a superficial level, using developmental data records and short anecdotal notes.

Amy: I have never experienced that level of attention seeking behaviour. You know but that had good things in itself because you would get to the Centre and sixty children would flock to you and um I never experienced that level before ...not sixty... and they'd call out the things they wanted to play with that day and what they wanted to make – they showed you – and they actually understood that I didn't understand much of the language and they would actually be very visual with their hands in communicating with me.

Thus, for Amy to understand her work in this environment as authentic and professional, she had to make an internal and discursive shift. At Battambang, her past "truths" proved inadequate to deal with the complexities that confronted her (Moss, 2003). She needed to open her mind to the possibility that there were other ways to do things effectively. Such an internal shift would expose her to the possibility of other constructions of children and childhood. Amy worked towards a new rhetoric that made it possible for her to reconceptualise her thinking in this respect (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Mayall, 1994, 1999). Amy could not allow previous truths or unconditional adherence (Hunter, 1993) to ideological approaches to constrain her. This is illustrated in the next section of the story where Amy illustrates how constraints to her thinking were challenged.

Amy: Mo was two and when he came to the Centre he had very, very little – he had no language. He didn't speak at all. Staff didn't even know his name. They'd ask him his name and he would hop down on his knees and hold his hands up and he would beg for food – um – because that's how he'd been raised. He was actually really, really malnourished and what he did start to learn was that food was available at the Centre quite regularly, however he still had some trust issues with that and every time there was food he just had to have it. Sometimes he'd store it, even if he couldn't eat it, he would store it.... We had these ice-cream sellers go past the Centre and we told them to go away, because basically the children had no money to buy the ice-creams... the ones that did shouldn't have had the money anyway and um, all the other children missed out, so you know we'd have these huge fights that would ensue, they'd actually get the ice-cream stolen anyway ...Mo... he'd been watching the ice-cream seller and watching all the older children get ice-creams and he had it pretty well sussed ... he goes over to the fence and um, he stands waiting for the ice-cream seller to serve him, um the ice-cream seller hands him an ice-cream. Mo puts his hand in his pocket like he is going to get his money out, the ice-cream seller gives him the ice-cream and Mo runs away and doesn't give him the money ... so... he starts yelling at the fence, the staff are just cracking up laughing because he has outsmarted the ice-cream seller

and that's when we realized he is incredibly intelligent and you could look at him and know 'Yeah he is gonna make it because he knows how to survive'

Here Amy draws attention to the resilience (Smyth & Fay, 2000) and competence of young children (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998), even in difficult circumstances. Amy's previous experience in western settings would not necessarily have prepared her for the initiative that Mo demonstrated. Additionally, traditional ECEC discourse, particularly that informed by theorists such as Piaget and Bowlby, would not have prepared Amy to understand Mo as being 'incredibly intelligent' i.e., able to outsmart an adult in this way. However, the addition of Amy's human services training held her in good stead as this exposed her to multiple discourses, allowing her to view children as competent and resilient (Prout, 2003). Thus, Amy's new knowledge about multiple conceptions of children and childhood began to inform her practice and impact on her sense of justice. In this practice environment, Amy saw that much more was possible than what she had been led to believe by her pre-existing psychologically-based knowledge of children and their development. Here, Amy became able to think about children more 'justly' than had previously been possible and she was able to apply this sense of justice to her practice.

AMY'S CHALLENGES - RESOURCES

As has previously been stated prior to commencing work with the children at Battambang Reception Centre, Amy's program and resource decisions were initially informed by her production as a traditional ECEC practitioner. However, as previously mentioned, these resourcing decisions proved problematic once the children chose to sell the resources for money. In order to address this issue, Amy assisted the children to make sustainable resources that proved less attractive for sale, but would remain after the completion of her practicum placement for more children to utilize. This decision was another example of "thinking otherwise" (Foucault, 1984; McWilliam, 1998) about the importance of certain resources to work with young children. Amy needed to rethink the way in which she would meet the challenge of providing resources that were able to be used as intended by the children, rather than becoming a source of income for them. As such, Amy had to let go of notions of aesthetics as important to resourcing ECEC practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1996; Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer & Richards, 1996). She needed to "think otherwise" about which resources were necessary in the context of practice at Battambang and about how such resources could be maintained after she had gone.

AMY'S CHALLENGES - SAFETY

Amy's understanding of safety for young children was informed by discourses producing her notion of childhood. Such conceptualizations were a part of her traditional ECEC practice and theoretical framework (Bredekamp & Copple, 1996; Dockett & Fler, 1999; Fler, 2000; Grieshaber, 2000). The children at

Battambang challenged these understandings by participating in trafficking and begging, along with playing, running and chasing one another on extremely high scaffolding far above ground level. Such incidents forced Amy to challenge preconceived notions of children and childhood, leading her to change her understandings to become informed more by other theoretical perspectives.

Amy: Obviously it wasn't just the playing that was the problem. Snakes and dengue mosquitoes frequently bit children. They were prevented by lack of funds, to getting medical attention and many children had medical conditions, which could be treated, such as Leukemia and other forms of cancer. Some had HIV Aids. Most pernicious of all, there were frequently traffickers at the fence trying to get children away. Staff had to ascertain whether family wanted the children or simply wanted to resell them.

Amy's understanding of children then needed to reflect the context within which she was working. Initially, her understanding of safety for young children was informed by discourses producing the notion of the vulnerable child (Jenks, 1996a, 1996b; McWilliam, 2003), which was part of DAP approaches (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2002; Grieshaber, 2000; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2002; Moss, 2000). Amy needed to reconceptualise her thinking, to think of children as resilient and not necessarily in need of protection (Perry, 1997). Furthermore, rather than be constrained by notions of resilience, Amy needed to use such conceptualizations of childhood to work with notions of development and vulnerability, in order to work both within and against (Lather, 1996) her production as an ECEC professional.

AMY'S CHALLENGES - RACISM

Further challenges that Amy faced during the earliest stages of her practicum placement surrounded issues of racism. Amy's understanding of how to work with racism was informed by discourses of culturally appropriate practice in ECEC (Gonzales-Mena, 2001). Additionally, postcolonial theories of the 'other' infer that an awareness of constructions of 'otherness' impact on practice in such non-western settings (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2002; Gonzales-Mena, 2001; Popkewitz, 2003). In Battambang, the Vietnamese children formed gangs, in order to deal with racist attacks from the Khmer children. In turn, the Vietnamese children would victimize the young children as a consequence of dealing with their issues with the Khmer children. Rather than being appalled by this gang behaviour, Amy decided to 'hang out' with the respective gangs, modeling acceptance to the Khmer children. She hoped that her behaviour would have a positive impact upon the Vietnamese children. If Amy had tried to merely enforce her ideological theories of culturally appropriate practice, then her success would have been severely limited. Amy had little hope of breaking up racist gangs in the short time that she was to be at Battambang. Instead she aimed to 'make a difference' for the time that she was there, working with the issue in any way that might achieve some success i.e., adapting her practice to suit the context. Here, Amy's efforts to make a difference grew out of the sense

of justice that she was developing. She did not allow delimited understanding to constrain what she did, but thought of other ways to work in this setting.

In fact, this was the essence of Amy's reconceptualist thinking in Battambang. As time went by, Amy realized that she needed to allow different or perhaps multiple understanding[s] to inform her practice. In this instance, the theoretical approaches that had produced her thinking had not been enough to support implementation of effective programs for these young children and their families. As such, multiple rhetorics, though constraining in their own right (Foucault, 1982; McArdle, 1999), would allow her to inform her practice in a way that gave her a greater chance of working in context with the families at Battambang. At Battambang, Amy needed to make internal shifts that allowed resilience to inform her initial understanding of the vulnerable child, the collective to be as important as the individual and survival to take precedence over social acceptance. As such, Amy needed to utilize multiple discourses, rather than relying on her traditional discursively produced understanding of children and childhood, allowing a sense of justice to prevail.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored how adherence to traditional conceptualizations of children and childhood and long held beliefs about practice in the ECEC field, can be inadequate when looking to implement effective programs for children and families in particular non-western settings. By examining the practicum experience of a student in the Bachelor of Human Services – Child and Family Studies program at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, these inadequacies have been highlighted. The paper argues that ECEC practice must be informed by contemporary and contextual understandings of children and childhood, as well as work with families in specific contexts. The narrative approach used in this paper has allowed for careful scrutiny of the regimes of truths (Foucault, 1980) inherent in ECEC practice, particularly that of DAP. The authors have argued that multiple perspectives are necessary so that effective and contextual programs are possible. Constraints present in adherence to particular discourses are less likely if multiple rhetorics inform practice. This allows for professionals to work within and against (Lather, 1996) previously constituted grand narratives and for the development of a strong sense of justice, which is necessary to work effectively with young children and their families across multiple contexts.

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Correspondence about this paper should be addressed to:

Kym Macfarlane
k.macfarlane@griffith.edu.au
Griffith University
Brisbane
Australia