Childcare – Human Services or Education: a genealogical approach

KYM MACFARLANE & TRISH LEWIS
Griffith University, Meadowbrook, Australia

ABSTRACT This article examines the implications of a ‘problem of the present’. It explores the potential conflicts and fragmentation that may arise as a result of divisions in the interpretation of the metanarrative of child development within the two disciplines of education and human services. Childcare in Australia is strongly driven by this metanarrative and already some providers in this country use developmental discourse as a way of de-emphasising the educational aspects of the work. These providers use the focus on child development as an argument to keep qualifications in the field at a minimum level. This has impacted on teachers in childcare, making it difficult for them to obtain recognition and adequate remuneration for their skills. In this article there is a particular focus on how childcare is situated in Australia and an examination of the constant struggle to ensure it remains a part of the educational context. The authors question the practicality of continuing this struggle given the particular historical context, societal position, and industrial situation in this country. It is argued that it is possible for childcare to maintain substantial links with educational discourse while still developing a strong identity of its own.

A Problem of the Present
Over the last three decades there has been considerable debate in Australia surrounding the care and education dichotomy, particularly in relation to childcare programs. It has been stated that this dichotomy is caused in part by a concentration on developmentally appropriate practice, as it has contributed to the blurring of the boundaries between the terms care, development, and education (Petrie, 1988; Silin, 1995; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001). The confusion that relates to these three terms has had a significant impact on the early childhood sector as a whole. As a result, there have been major divisions between early childhood educators about what constitutes ‘proper’ early childhood practice and who is best qualified to undertake such practice.
Examples of this issue are many and varied (Petrie, 1988; Tyler, 1993; Silin, 1995; Tobin, 1997; Burton & Lyons, 2000) and while this variation can add richness to the field as a whole, it can also produce constraints that delimit the practices of teachers and other practitioners in the field.

This article examines the blurring of the boundaries between the terms development, care, and education, and problematises the categories that are produced as a result. The authors argue that the fluidity of the boundaries signifying the three terms causes issues for practitioners who work in the field with regard to what constitutes ‘proper’ practice in early childhood education and care. The discourse that produces the understandings of these three terms works to situate practitioners in categories of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’, and generally privileges education over care and development. This has proved problematic in many ways for the field in general, in that it allows for teaching to be seen as distinct from caring and developing. What occurs then, in effect, is that trained teachers are viewed as ‘proper’ participants in the care and education of young children because the discursive organisation of education produces only trained teachers as educators. It is unthinkable for other practitioners who hold alternative qualifications to be considered educators and consequently these practitioners viewed as somehow less worthy or able. In this work, the ‘Bachelor of Human Services – Child and Family Studies’ program, which exists in the Faculty of Health at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia, is used to represent this type of alternative qualification. This program is used to explore the suitability of such alternatives as appropriate qualifications for producing leaders in the childcare field.

A genealogical approach to these issues is used in this article in order to problematise rigid categories of ‘proper’ practitioners and ‘proper’ practice. Genealogy provides a framework for examining ‘problems of the present’, such as the situating of a childcare program outside an education faculty. This method takes a non-linear approach to historical data, in that it informs practitioners’ understanding of how selected events or discontinuities have produced discursive shifts, which in turn lead to significant alterations in practice (Foucault, 1991; Tyler & Johnson, 1991; Meredyth & Tyler, 1993; Tamboukou, 1999; Meadmore et al, 2000). In this way, genealogy provides space for the consideration of an alternative understanding of how the problem has been produced and of possible consequences that could occur.

The Problem

In 1998 the ‘Bachelor of Human Services – Child and Family Studies’ program began at the Logan Campus of Griffith University, Queensland, Australia. This program had its beginnings in the Faculty of Education at Griffith University and, as a result of pragmatic decision-making, it was eventually moved to coincide with the development of the new School of Human Services at the Logan Campus. In Australia it is more common, in fact almost always the case, for childcare related degrees to exist within faculties of education. Moreover,
early childhood educational discourse situates childcare within education, claiming that the care, development, and education (in the generic sense) of young children are inextricably linked (Brennan, 1994; Hutchins, 1995; Greenman & Stonehouse, 1997; Docket & Fleer, 1999; Hutchins & Sims, 1999). Consequently, up until this point in Queensland it had been unthinkable that a degree program relating to the care and education of young children could exist outside education.

While it appears a reasonable decision to align this program with human services in order to incorporate a child welfare aspect into the program, it has resulted in some unintended consequences for students and staff alike. Graduates, students, and staff are constantly facing significant issues with respect to training, employment, industrial conditions, child development discourse, pedagogical practice, and philosophical divisions within the field. This article examines these issues along with the conditions that produced this problem and the subsequent implications for practice and for the childcare field.

**Background**

The ‘Bachelor of Human Services – Child and Family Studies’ program qualifies students to work in both childcare and child welfare. The graduates of this program are able to work in welfare settings, such as foster care, child protection, policy making and women’s refuges, as well as school-based care. The program is also accredited by the Department of Families (Queensland), qualifying students to be the following:

- director of a long day centre (i.e. full-day care centre) or an occasional care centre with a licensed capacity of more than 30 children;
- director of a care centre with limited hours;
- director of a kindergarten;
- group leader in a long day care centre or occasional care centre;
- coordinator of a family day-care scheme. (Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, Qld, 1999)

What this accreditation effectively means for graduates is that they can be in charge of day-care centres, kindergartens, and family day-care workers, and that they may act as group leaders within day-care centres working under a director.

As stated, this qualification is one of the few degree programs that exist outside the auspices of an education faculty and that qualify graduates to work as directors in childcare centres. Other childcare qualifications exist, either as degree programs in education faculties or as diploma programs in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges. The ‘Bachelor of Human Services – Child and Family Studies’ program represents an alternative qualification where students gain knowledge and skills in the following areas: interpersonal communication, change management, group facilitation, research methods, influencing policy, ethical practice, human development and learning,
counselling, the care and education of children from birth to 12 years, management, and the study of society. Generally, students leave the program as highly qualified professionals with a strong skill base and a unique ability to work with young children and their families. In short, these graduates can act as leaders in their field and are in a strong position to advocate for children and their families in a variety of ways.

An Anomaly

Even though this program produces highly qualified graduates, it exists as an anomaly in the childcare sector and is in apparent contradiction to the early childhood educational discourse. It is therefore important to consider what the conditions of possibility are that allow for this discursive discontinuity (Foucault, 1991), i.e. what social conditions existed to lead to the formation of this degree and its situation in the Faculty of Health? An examination of these conditions of possibility will assist in understanding how it is thinkable that a childcare degree can exist outside education at this particular historical time.

A genealogical approach provides a unique opportunity to examine this event and its implications because of the nature of the problem, i.e. accounting for an apparent anomaly or discontinuity in a set of social scenarios – in this case, the categorisation of childcare and education. By focussing on discursive conditions that surround a particular event or practice, genealogy works in such a way as to make the present 'strange' rather than the past 'familiar' (Meredyth & Tyler, 1993, p. 4). Consequently, genealogy is an ideal methodology for the examination of this problem, where the positioning of the 'Bachelor of Human Services – Child and Family Studies' program is seen as 'strange' in the current early childhood educational context (Macfarlane, 2001).

The Genealogical Approach

Genealogy is a relatively new methodological approach, which attempts to conceptualise problems of the present in different ways from how traditional or revisionist histories have understood and described them (Macfarlane, 2001). Michel Foucault (1986) introduced this method, distinguishing it from traditional history by insisting on its ability to affirm all knowledge as perspective. When using the genealogical method, the present rather than the past becomes the object of inquiry, leading to scrutiny of how present practices are seen as 'strange' (Tyler & Johnson, 1991). Therefore, historians of the present must re-evaluate their own position, thereby bringing into question how past practice has shaped the investigator’s present position and allowing for a more balanced critique of an event or practice than can occur via traditional historical interpretation (Meadmore et al, 2000).

Foucault used genealogy as a consistent framework for examining the present, as it was his view that history must serve the concerns of the present (Meadmore et al, 2000). Foucault was concerned with the examination of a
present event at the local level, which allows us to take into account the understandings of those directly involved in the struggle, valuing their knowledge and understanding of the way the event has been produced (Macfarlane, 2001). It is this knowledge that will assist us in accounting for the discontinuities that have contributed to the event, which would probably be disqualified in traditional analysis. By allowing for multiplicities of knowledges, genealogy assists the reader to examine effectively these discontinuities, which, when explored in this way, give a more complete understanding of how an event can be possible at any given historical time (Macfarlane, 2001).

Genealogy seeks to inquire into processes, procedures, and techniques through which truth, knowledge, and belief are produced (Meadmore et al, 2000). The genealogical approach uses this inquiry in such a way as to obtain a greater understanding of how the production of truth, knowledge, and belief allows certain practices to be acceptable and others unacceptable (Macfarlane, 2001). Moreover, genealogy is concerned with the production and analysis of discourse and how discourses affect social practice. Furthermore, according to Meadmore et al (2000), genealogy demonstrates how particular discourses are historically constituted as well as how they become changed and reconstituted into qualitatively different practices (Macfarlane, 2001).

Termed ‘history of the present’ (Foucault, in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982 p. 118), genealogy seeks to ‘emancipate historical knowledges’ (Gordon, 1980, p. 85), allowing them a legitimate role in questioning the more formal and accepted scientific discourses, which, through their familiarity, shape many of our social practices (Macfarlane, 2001). Instead of using historical data to explain present practice, the genealogist uses an approach that:

- takes as its starting point questions posed in the present, investigating the terms in which those problems are currently understood, and tracing the line of descent that has led to problems being posed in these ways.
  (Meredth & Tyler, 1993, p. 4)

Within this genealogical method Foucault is concerned with games of truth and error (1985, p. 6) and refers to the construction of ‘truth’ through discursive practices (Foucault, 1991). According to Foucault (1985), these new truth games contribute to the self-governing of the individual. Foucault uses the genealogical method to highlight the way in which this occurs. Caroline Hatcher states that genealogy is an effective research method that:

- acknowledges that the way in which the world is divided up, labelled, and given meaning constitutes our subjectivity in ways which are historically and locally specific. Language constitutes and reproduces our social organisation and thus contestations around language become enactments of power relations. Certain ways of speaking become legitimate and others disqualified. (1998, p. 46)

In short, genealogy is the most effective method to use in this particular instance because it acknowledges the importance of this discursive organisation in the constitution of the subject in relation to both local and historical events.
As such, genealogy allows for a closer and more local examination of how the problem at hand has been produced, as well as what conditions of possibility and discursive shifts occurred at that particular time to cause a change in practice (Macfarlane, 2001).

**Possible Conditions, Possible Change**

According to Foucault (1991), changes in practice, such as the introduction of the 'Human Services – Child and Family Studies' degree program and its situation in the Faculty of Health, are a result of discursive shifts, which alter how it is possible to think about particular issues. In this instance, it has been possible to think of childcare as part of health and welfare, and not education, i.e. the psychological discourses producing health and welfare also produce a shift in thinking, which impacts on the way in which childcare is constituted. A shift such as this allows for the possibility to think of child development as being different from education. It is how such thinking is produced and the consequences of this production that are of most interest in this article.

It is not within the scope of this work to examine all of the local and historical events that have led to the positioning of this program in human services. Rather, there is a focus on events that were significant incidents or discontinuities, which have led to changes in discourses and allowed them to be reconstituted into qualitatively different practices. It is these discontinuities that cause the discursive shifts that create 'cleavages in [society] that shift about, fracture unities and [affect] re-groupings' (Foucault, 1985, pp. 95-96), resulting in a significant impact on social, educational, or cultural practice (Macfarlane, 2001). In this case this examination will include a focus on industrial, social, and political issues and policy, which are part of the discursive organisation of early childhood education and care.

Discourse is the term used in post-structuralist work to name systems of language use, which are, simultaneously, systems of power relations (Macfarlane, 2001). Discourses constitute the subjects – including human subjects – that they appear simply to describe. As Foucault argues, '[d]iscourses are not about objects: they constitute them and in the practice of doing so, conceal their own invention' (in Gordon, 1980, p. 49). Importantly, he goes on to say that discourses are 'irreducible to language and to speech' (p. 49). They are systems for producing what is sayable rather than being the words used to say it. Thus, it is the logic being applied to speak about childcare, rather than any particular words, which should be the object of analysis for the genealogist (Macfarlane, 2001). Therefore, how childcare has been discursively produced in Australia and how this has altered over time will be the focus of examination in this instance. Additionally, a discursive reading of the terms ‘care’, ‘development’, and ‘education’ will be undertaken in order to track the shifts that cause changes in practice for early childhood practitioners.
CHILDCARE AS HUMAN SERVICE OR EDUCATION

The Industrial Issue
When considering the introduction of the ‘Bachelor of Human Services – Child and Family Studies’ program, it is necessary to examine the industrial situation in which the childcare field operates. In Australia, each state has different industrial legislation and it is true that some have produced better conditions for their childcare workers than others. However, it is the states with the most extreme industrial conditions that bear examination, as it is these conditions that create the impetus for possible changes to occur. The state of Queensland presents a solid example of an extreme industrial situation. In Queensland, two very significant events have occurred, which have created particular conditions that have produced changes in practice and ultimately led to it being possible to think of childcare as existing outside education. Both of these events will be considered in order to determine how they relate to the discursive shifts that produce early childhood education and care at this particular time.

In 1990 the Queensland Association of Teachers in Independent Schools (QATIS) brokered an important deal with the Federated Miscellaneous Workers’ Union (FMWU). An agreement was reached that saw the movement of teachers in childcare from QATIS to the FMWU. Although this meant that all childcare workers were now covered by the FMWU, other early childhood teachers, such as those teaching in kindergartens, non-government preschools, and non-government schools, remained under the auspices of QATIS (Fitch, 1990).

The agreement to move trained teachers working in childcare from QATIS was struck for pragmatic reasons. It allowed for teachers in childcare to move to the FMWU where other childcare workers were already positioned. At the same time, teacher assistants in kindergartens affiliated with the Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland became part of QATIS. This facilitated the governing of employees’ industrial conditions and organised all childcare workers into the same industrial union.

This dividing action aligned kindergarten and preschool with education, and childcare separately from education. This is illustrated by the Queensland Independent Education Union’s Union Rules (2000), which include the following section on membership:

The Union shall consist of an unlimited number of persons who are:
Employed as Teachers or who are usually employed as teachers in ...
establishments which are affiliated to the Crèche and Kindergarten Association ... or other like establishments which provide an educational programme but are not Childcare Centres. (p. 2)

What occurred subsequently was a significant division between early childhood teachers in different fields, which ultimately positioned teachers who worked in childcare outside education. Although this was possibly an unintended consequence of the deal, the result caused an alteration in the discursive organisation of childcare, positioning childcare teachers as ‘carers’ and not ‘educators’. Consequently, the categories of carer and educator developed in
relation to early childhood practice. The reorganisation of the union membership worked to position childcare teachers in the category of carer, making it unthinkable for them to exist as educators, and yet teacher aides who had less formal training than childcare teachers were categorised as educators.

The amalgamation of childcare workers into one union could also be seen as a way of facilitating economic management. Prior to this amalgamation, the alignment of childcare workers and teachers with different unions was costly and ineffective to administer (Brennan, 1994), therefore the governing of these workers under the same union allowed their economic management to be more effective.

The Glass-house Kindergarten

The conditions of possibility that allowed this positioning of childcare teachers did exist prior to 1990. For some time there had been a blurring of the boundaries between care, development, and education. One particular example of this was the establishment of the Lady Gowrie Centres prior to the Second World War. The Lady Gowrie Centres were originally funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, and not the Department of Education. These Centres were established after intense lobbying by the National Health and Medical Research Council (Tyler, 1993). They were set up as model kindergartens and included observation booths that allowed early childhood teachers to observe the ‘glass-house’ kindergarten (Macfarlane, 2001).

The Lady Gowrie Centres initially focussed more on child development than education. Interestingly, however, the fluidity of the categories of development and education at that particular time allowed the terms to be used almost synonymously and so, while the Centres were focussing on development, they were essentially also focussing on education. According to Deborah Tyler (1993), staff in these Centres consulted a manual, which assisted them to make judgements of children based on knowledge of developmental psychology (Macfarlane, 2001). In turn, these staff were expected to plan a program of ‘all round development’ for each child (Cumpston & Heinig, 1944, p. 86 in Tyler, 1993, p. 50), which assisted in furthering the skills of the children in their care. Consequently, while the focus of these ‘model’ centres was on development, it also encompassed the education of the child. The positioning of childcare in the Department of Health and not in the Department of Education, however, gave emphasis to development over education. The discourses governing health were more aligned to human development and not necessarily to human education. Thus, it was the discursive organisation of health, and not that of education, which determined the focus of childcare. In Foucauldian terms, childcare was strongly governed by the humanist and psychological discourses, which produced society’s view of health and welfare. With respect to childcare, these discourses acted to privilege development over education (Foucault, 1991; Tyler, 1993). Consequently, for many years the metanarrative of child development drove early childhood practice, producing
the notion that ‘proper’ early childhood education was soundly focussed on what was considered developmentally appropriate practice.

In reference to this, the significance of the QATIS agreement cannot be underestimated, as it indicated a discursive shift that situated childcare and child-centred practice outside education. This had the effect of producing a dichotomy, or perhaps a trichotomy of care, development, and education, which worked to position theory and practice in the early childhood field as linked and moving through the three categories. The result of this production of categories was that early childhood practitioners were also categorised and, as such, their practice existed as defined by care, development, or education. While these categories were fluid, allowing practitioners to move between them, they also delimited practice by privileging issues of propriety, i.e. it was proper to think of childcare practitioners as associated with care and development, and teachers with education. The result of this discursive organisation was that it became unthinkable for any childcare practitioners to exist in the category of teacher, as this would be considered improper. Thus, the QATIS agreement, rather than symbolising pedagogical unity, divided teachers in childcare and teachers in other early childhood settings (May, 1997).

Again it is apparent that issues of economic management are involved here. The divisions that exist between practitioners in different sectors continue to be driven by issues of economics and professional status. It is clear that the QATIS agreement significantly impacted on the professional status and working conditions of teachers in childcare. While the governing of practitioners in this field was made easier by their amalgamation into the FMWU, the status of teachers in this sector did not improve. The amalgamation actually had the effect of dragging childcare teachers down to the remuneration levels of other childcare workers rather than elevating the status of the workers overall. Consequently, the positioning of childcare teachers as childcare workers had the effect of removing their professional status, which was a necessary component of entry into the category of educator. Teachers in childcare, in fact all childcare workers, struggle to be recognised as professional to a greater degree than their counterparts in other early childhood sectors (Burton & Lyons, 2000).

**Divided We Fall**

During the 1970s when the rhetoric of the Australian Government was more socially democratic (Karmel, 1973; Hogan, 1984; Marginson, 1985; Knight, 1993), the education and care debate was at the forefront of policy. It was during this time that the Whitlam Labor Government attempted to introduce a program of care and education of young children that included an increased funding program for childcare and free preschool education for children aged four to five. The central principle of this program was that no rigid distinction should exist between the education and care of young children (Brennan, 1998).
The Whitlam Government’s plan was an attempt to deal with the lobbying by various women’s groups for a more organised and well-funded approach to childcare. However, although the Government was very attuned to this issue and prepared to consider some alternatives, the women’s groups themselves were divided and extremely disorganised (Brennan, 1994, 1998). It was clear from Government rhetoric that the distinction between care and education should be non-existent, but some women’s groups were not in agreement. There was, in fact, a great deal of antipathy between some Labor women’s groups and the Australian Preschool Association (APA), with the former stating that the APA was maintaining a ‘narrow educational focus at the expense of professionals concerned with the young child and its family’ (Brennan, 1998, p. 83). Thus, although Government rhetoric was espousing the end of the dichotomisation of care, development, and education, some groups were ensuring its continuity.

To complicate matters further, this disagreement was occurring alongside a funding shortfall. In 1974 the Labor Government’s commitment to the childcare program was waning. This growing disinterest was due to the divisions between the sectors, particularly women’s groups and the groups focussing on educational approaches (Departments of Education, APA, and others who were preparing reports for the federal Government favouring sessional preschool education), as well as the rising costs of implementing a program as extensive as that proposed (Brennan, 1998). Consequently, it was announced that the full program would be stalled until 1975, reducing expenditure for 1974 from A$130m. to A$34m. (Brennan, 1998, p. 90). Thus, even though the end of the care and education dichotomy was present in Government rhetoric, the reality was quite different. The funding shortfall meant that the complete program could not be adopted in full. The difference of opinion among women’s groups gave the Government an opportunity to view childcare as an issue that could be ignored and, as an alternative, most states instituted a program of free sessional preschool that was attached to state primary schools. Education and care were once more dichotomised and economics, political expediency, and group divisions were the deciding factors in the decision (Brennan, 1994, 1998).

To Save the Economy

Following the election of the Hawke–Keating Labor Government in 1987, childcare began to gain an increased profile with respect to economic management. In fact, the Australian Labor Party Report of the Working Party on Childcare stated in 1998 that:

Childcare is a critical part of the Government policy of economic recovery and increased productivity. In straight economic terms, childcare is an investment by Government that has contributed to Australia’s recovery ...
Childcare provisions are not welfare, they are a crucial part of the overall

The Labor Government of the time strongly tied its economic policy to an increase in funding for childcare places. This Government saw childcare as a way to ensure its commitment to social justice as well as of enabling the economy to prosper. This prosperity was a necessary step following the budget deficit of 1983 and the subsequent pressure on Government to cut social welfare spending (Knight, 1993). Childcare became the means with which the Government could maintain its social justice agenda, by promoting equity through increased funding and fee relief to parents, as well as increasing employment opportunities for women and boosting the building and labour industries (Brennan, 1998).

Linking childcare with the economy had the effect of promoting it as an industry and as part of the caring sector (Lyons, 2001). This aligned childcare with other participants in this sector, such as care of the elderly, health care, and respite care. There was considerable concern within the early childhood field at the time that this alignment promoted private centres ahead of the more educationally focussed community centres (Brennan, 1998; Lyons, 2001). In order to allay the fears of such organisations as the National Association of Community Based Children’s Services and the Australian Early Childhood Association that the increased reliance on private childcare would lead to poorer quality practices for young children, the Government linked increased funding to the private sector by increasing fee relief and improving quality and accreditation standards. This would, it was argued, improve the quality of all centres, both community and private (Brennan, 1998).

At the time Prime Minister Hawke argued that whether parents used private or government-funded centres they were entitled to quality care (Brennan, 1998). The private sector argued against improved accreditation standards, stating that the personal qualities of caregivers were more important than formal qualifications (Brennan, 1998). In the midst of these discussions, while terms such as quality, care, and development were prolific in Government rhetoric, the term ‘education’ did not feature.

Development versus Education

The QATIS agreement was the precursor of another very significant event that further shaped the course of childcare in Queensland. In 1996 the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC) handed down a landmark decision that was to have a significant impact on the childcare field in Queensland. A claim that early childhood teachers working in day care should receive pay parity with teachers in other sectors went before the Commission. During these hearings this claim was reduced to one issue, i.e. whether teachers employed in day-care centres were actually teaching. The decision was that teachers in day care were not teaching – they were merely providing a developmental program. It was decided that, as a developmental program
required ‘less’ skill, these teachers did not deserve pay parity (Burton & Lyons, 2000).

In this case it is clear that education was privileged over development in these hearings, i.e. those who were involved in delivering educational programs were to receive more remuneration than those delivering so-called developmental programs. The Industrial Court endorsed a discursive shift that acted to privilege education over development. As this Court is an organisation accorded the status of defining ‘truth’, then its decision in turn reflected a particular position that demarcated the difference between education and development. In this instance, the lines between education and development were not blurred. Education was clearly more worthwhile and those who provided education were worth more fisically. As such, the position of all childcare practitioners, particularly those who were teachers, was diminished and once again economic management impacted on how childcare was discursively positioned in the community.

During the court case, private long day care providers argued against the claim (Burton & Lyons, 2000). The employers’ arguments centred on the fact that, if they employed a teacher but did not require that teacher to provide an educational program, there was no clear reason to pay for such a program. Significantly, one employers’ organisation argued:

If Teachers [sic] are to have a significant place in childcare it needs to be on the basis that they are doing something conceptually and identifiably different to other childcare workers. If this is not the case and the view is maintained that they do the same thing as other workers only a whole lot better, then the simple reality is that the childcare industry does not in most cases want or need what they have to offer. (Local Government Association final submission, QIRC, 1996, p. 11)

At the time of the discussion and in the eyes of the Court and, ostensibly, the community, a teacher offered a formal educational program. Educational programs were highly valued and therefore the educational ‘truth’. It was not ‘thinkable’, because of the arguments presented to the Court, that a developmental program could also be an educational program. Therefore, the discursive organisation of education at that time did not allow space for a developmental program to be seen as educational.

In this instance, the decision allowed employers to gain an economic advantage. By simply stating that they did not require any teacher they employed to provide an educational program, they were able to pay that teacher less than a counterpart in another educational setting. The professional status of those in childcare was again in question and, in terms of remuneration, teachers in childcare were not seen as equal to those in other sectors. As childcare centres had become prolific following the increase in funding from the Hawke–Keating Labor Government, this was a significant economic windfall for employers. This decision has also played a major role in
producing the conditions of possibility that allow for childcare to become positioned outside education.

Where to from Here?
So what does this mean for early childhood practitioners as a whole? The Queensland case, while situated at the extreme of the spectrum, does signify the possibility for childcare to be permanently excluded from education. If this is to occur, then, as Burton & Lyons (2000) suggest, it is clear that a new rhetoric will be required for childcare in order for the profession to develop a strong identity of its own outside education.

It is possible for early childhood practitioners to continue to situate childcare within education, to cling to past ‘truths’ and metanarratives, and to insist that childcare is education and that care, development, and education are undeniably intertwined. However, this approach may not have much impact on governments or communities as a whole given the current discursive organisation of education, which privileges corporate managerial approaches and focuses on the benefits of private enterprise. Discourses of education also frequently ignore the multifunctional nature of childcare and limit the development of services that acknowledge the needs of families and communities (Hutchins & Sims, 1996), thereby underselling the valuable contribution childcare makes to the community.

If in the early childhood profession there is a strong belief that education and care are inextricably linked, then it should be possible for early childhood teachers to let go of preconceived ideas and metanarratives so that the field of childcare can develop an identity of its own. All childcare workers can become early childhood professionals (Stonehouse, 1994) with little distinction between the different groups, thereby allowing space to be created for the professionalisation of the field on its own terms. Thus, rather than appearing to be the poor cousin of other early childhood programs, programs such as the one in the School of Human Services in Queensland can hold a legitimate place in the early childhood sector with respect to the education of young children. However, in Foucauldian terms, discourses of childcare are not presently ‘powerful’ enough to gain professional status and to ‘plug into’ (Ward, 1996) the corporate managerial discourses of professionalism that are so much a part of Commonwealth Government rhetoric and policy (Lingard & Rivzi, 1992; Rivzi, 1993; Symth, 1995; Marginson, 1996, 1997; Gwyther, 1997; McWilliam, 1998; Meadmore, 2000). In addition, it will be unlikely that discourses of childcare can be strengthened while the multifunctional role of childcare is not acknowledged within the profession, and particularly while these discourses are linked to the one-dimensional approach that characterises those in education.

Degree programs such as the one in the School of Human Services in Queensland produce multi-skilled practitioners with eclectic approaches to practice, which allow them to consider many possible perspectives in dealing with children and families. It is therefore less likely that these practitioners will
be constrained by particular metanarratives that encourage a narrow view to practice, which does not include contemporary constructions of childhood and families (Jenks, 1996, 1996a; Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Prout, 2003). Instead, they are informed by multiple knowledges that allow them to ‘think otherwise’ (McWilliam, 1998, p. 4) about given situations and ensure that their practice is epistemologically and ontologically relevant. This occurs through an exposure to the multiple disciplines that comprise the program and that present a variety of views from academics who come from different fields of practice. Exposure to such perspectives ensures very competent childcare professionals who are not only of great benefit to children and families, but are ‘the perfect corporate fit’ (McWilliam, 1998, p. 2) for Government and industry at this particular historical time. By allowing practitioners such as these into the field, the childcare industry has a much greater chance of developing a strong identity that will plug into stronger and more powerful discourses, thereby promoting a more powerful position for the childcare industry as a whole and linking it to discourses of professionalism.

As long as the early childhood sector continues to hold onto the belief that only teachers understand how to ‘teach’, the conditions of possibility for a new identity and rhetoric will be unlikely to eventuate. In Foucauldian terms, what is needed instead is a ‘pessimistic activism’ (in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, pp. 231-232) – a constant resistance (McWilliam, 1999) – where all early childhood practitioners work together both within and against (Lather, 1996) the metanarrative of child development. As Lather (1996) attests, it is possible to overcome the constraints of particular metanarratives by critiquing and deconstructing theoretical approaches while also working within them. In this way, practitioners are able to take relevant and useful practices from theory and research, without being constrained by seeking to understand particular metanarratives as the only proper way to practice. Thus, it is possible that practitioners can critique and evaluate philosophies and practices in order to ensure high quality outcomes that continue to have relevance for children and their families in the twenty-first century. If teachers in the field can ‘think otherwise’ (McWilliam, 1998, p. 4) about who can be effective practitioners in childcare and can acknowledge how current educational and developmental discourses are producing particular constraints, then it is more likely to be possible to think of childcare as a professional practice.

Therefore, the use of a genealogical methodology allows particular problems and anomalies to be viewed differently, as the approach is neither judgemental nor problem-solving. The methodology suggests an approach that encompasses a detached evaluation and assessment of particular problems whilst examining multiple perspectives. Approached in this way, it is possible that the positioning of the ‘Bachelor of Human Services – Child and Family Studies’ program outside an educational faculty can become easier to comprehend and less intimidating to practitioners who strive to maintain the educational focus of childcare programs. It becomes possible to see that practitioners from other disciplines may usefully inform childcare practice.
without negating the value of an educational influence. It can be argued that this multidisciplinary approach will ensure that childcare practice remains of the highest quality.

Correspondence
Kym Macfarlane, School of Human Services, Griffith University (Logan Campus), Meadowbrook, Queensland 4131, Australia (k.macfarlane@griffith.edu.au); Trish Lewis, Christchurch College of Education, Dovedale Avenue, PO Box 31-065, Ilam, Christchurch 8030, New Zealand (trish.lewis@cce.ac.nz).

References


