



BEYOND QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

LANGUAGES OF EVALUATION

Gunilla Dahlberg, Peter Moss and Alan Pence

Routledge Education Classic Editions

Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care

Taking a broad approach, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care* relates issues of early childhood to the sociology of childhood, philosophy, ethics, political science and other fields and to an analysis of the world we live in today. It places these issues in a global context and draws on work from Canada, Sweden and Italy, including the world famous nurseries in Reggio Emilia.

Working with postmodern ideas, this book questions the search to define and measure quality in the early childhood field and its tendency to reduce philosophical issues of value to purely technical and managerial issues of expert knowledge and measurement.

With a brand new Introduction to this classic text, the authors argue that there are other ways than the 'discourse of quality' for understanding and evaluating early childhood pedagogical work and relate these to alternative ways of understanding early childhood itself and the purposes of early childhood institutions.

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Languages of evaluation

Classic Edition

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This edition published 2013

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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First edition published 1999 by Falmer Press

Second edition published 2007 by Routledge

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN13: 978-0-415-81904-6 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-82022-6 (pbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-37111-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman

by Keystroke, Station Road, Codsall, Wolverhampton

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Authors' introduction to the current edition

When we wrote *Beyond Quality in Education and Care* in the 1990s, we had no expectation it would become one of the most widely cited books on early childhood of recent years, or be translated into ten languages, or achieve 'classic' status. With the book about to be re-issued as part of the Routledge Education Classic Edition Series, we have asked ourselves again why it has achieved such relative success? Not, we suspect, because of the brilliance of the authors! More likely, as we suggested in our preface to the book's second edition in 2007, because *Beyond Quality* has ridden a wave of disenchantment with, and resistance to, a mainstream narrative about early childhood education, a narrative seeking global hegemony. It is a narrative that tells a simple but persuasive story: that prescribed 'human technologies' (Rose, 1999) prescriptively applied to children at a young age will achieve prescribed outcomes in later life across a wide range of areas. It is a narrative of 'investment' in 'human capital' to improve 'standards' and 'performance' and achieve 'economic payoffs' that will give high 'returns on investment'. And, as the narrative tells it, the secret of such high returns is 'quality', that compound of conditions and processes needed to fully exploit 'human capital'.

In this narrative, 'quality' has no need of context or complexity, diversity or democracy. For 'quality' is a universal formula, identified and distilled by experts for application anywhere or anytime to achieve standardized results. 'Quality' is the expression of an early childhood education where technical practice, not politics or ethics, is first practice; an education where political questions—'not mere technical issues to be solved by experts . . . [but questions that] always involve decisions which require us to make choices between conflicting alternatives' (Mouffe, 2007, np)—are ignored in favour of the managerial demand to know 'what works?' Such 'quality', in short, marks the end of diversity, movement and experimentation in early childhood education, fixing it in perpetuity to a tried, proven and unchanging formula. Or so the story goes.

The story is persuasive and has a large following. Powered by reductionist thinking, decontextualized research and universal claims, spread by the agency of powerful international organizations advised by a coterie of experts, and uncritically adopted by governments swayed by such organizations, it is heard in every corner of the world today. It offers simple and apparently profitable answers,

summed up in the title of a recent English government report, 'Early Intervention: Smart Investment, Massive Savings' (Allen, 2011). Quality, as we have indicated, is central to this message, since quality is shorthand for the prescriptive technology that supposedly holds the secret to 'smart investment' and 'massive returns'.

The appeal is not hard to comprehend. As inequality and competition grow, as winners take all and losers are left behind, as environments and resources come under growing stress, the mainstream narrative promises 'quality' early childhood education and care as a technical fix that assures individual and national survival in a cut-throat globalized market and supplies balm for social ills. It holds out the lure of effective performance sub-contracted to experts and technicians, combining the control of quality assurance and the certainty of predetermined outcomes, and all the while avoiding the complexities and messiness of politics and ethics.

But comprehension is one thing, agreement something else altogether. *Beyond Quality* contests the narrative and offers *an* other narrative – not, we always stress, *the* other. It is here, we conclude, that the book's success lies. For the book resonates with a longing felt by many for other ways of thinking, talking and doing early childhood education and care, ways that lead us away from the linear, reductionist and mechanistic paradigm of the mainstream narrative, with its abhorrence of diversity, complexity and context. This longing is felt by many people—teachers, students, academics, parents—in many countries. Increasingly, too, these individuals are connected to others who share this longing, forming what might be termed a resistance movement or movements. There is space only for a few examples.

In the English-speaking world, 1991 was a significant date, with the first Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education Research and Practice (RECE) conference, held in Madison, Wisconsin, and the publication of a key special issue journal (Swadener and Kessler, 1991). Concerned by the dominance of developmental psychology and the need to contest the early childhood mainstream, the RECE conference is now an annual international event that connects a global network of scholars and educators. The journal issue was the precursor of a vibrant and growing literature, critiquing the mainstream and exploring the potential of other possibilities in early childhood education. This includes *Valuing Quality in Early Childhood Services*, an edited volume published in 1994, to which all three of us contributed (Moss and Pence, 1994); and the Contesting Early Childhood series that two of us edit, which not only 'questions the current dominant discourses surrounding early childhood' but offers 'alternative narratives of an area that is now made up of a multitude of perspectives and debates'.

At the same time, interest across the world in the early childhood pedagogy of the Italian city of Reggio Emilia, about which *Beyond Quality* provides important insights, goes from strength to strength. Pedagogical documentation, originating in Reggio but now inspiring people in many places around the world, has proved very productive for researching children's learning processes and for challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of the dominant narrative. The many people and

places working with inspiration from Reggio form one of the largest and most widespread strands in what we have termed the resistance movement.

Sweden has been another notable strand in the movement, with a strong interest in Reggio Emilia, building since the 1980s, as well as in other approaches that contest the dominant narrative. As just one indication of this interest, a regular week-long summer symposium, first begun in 1996 with some 60 participants, now hosts around 350. It provides opportunities for researchers and preschool teachers to discuss and share work that uses alternative theoretical perspectives, such as those of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, and is an instance of the growing interest in working with post-structural theories in the field of early childhood education, in Sweden and beyond (see, for example, the books by Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; MacNaughton, 2005; Lenz-Taguchi, 2010; Olsson, 2009; and Sellers, forthcoming, in the *Contesting Early Childhood* series).

As a final example, the work on generative curriculum discussed in this book has extended and gained recognition from UNESCO and other international organizations as an effective practice in support of local voices, values and knowledge. Initiated through work with indigenous communities in Canada, the approach is now active in Africa and other parts of the Majority (Developing) World supporting the development of literatures and perspectives that speak to the importance of context and diversity over the imposition of a single, hegemonic understanding (Pence, in press).

As these examples suggest, resistance takes diverse forms. But it shares some common ground: an incredulity at the claims of the dominant narrative and fear of its consequences; an appreciation of the relationship between power and knowledge, contributing to a scepticism about universal, decontextualized and supposedly objective truth claims; an understanding of the modernist paradigm from which emerges the dominant narrative and the concept of quality—but also a profound disenchantment with that paradigm; a desire to explore the potential of other paradigmatic positions and new theoretical perspectives; and pleasure in complexity, diversity and uncertainty. It sees in the early childhood education espoused by the dominant narrative, including its fixation with ‘quality’, a dangerous means to tame and govern children (and adults), and to grasp the Other and make the Other into the Same, to smother alterity in the embrace of standardized categories and outcomes. It seeks instead an early childhood education that respects otherness and welcomes uncertainty and complexity, amazement and wonder.

Beyond Quality argues that ‘quality’ is a concept that is neither neutral nor natural. Rather, it is a constructed concept, inscribed with assumptions and values that make it a powerful tool for normalization and control, for governing at a distance and managing performance. ‘Quality’ protects us from the messiness and contestation that arises when we have to stop, think, articulate and argue for what it is we really desire, value and hope for—when we have to take ourselves from the comfort zone of the technical to the unsettling arena of the political, to ask and discuss political questions with their conflicting alternatives: what is our image of the child? what do we understand by ‘education’ and ‘care’? what do we want for

our children? and so on. 'Quality', in short, is a substitute for thought and responsibility, delegating both to experts who will tell us where we must go and how we should get there—a partial perspective masquerading as objective and self-evident truth.

Central to the book is a simple idea: 'quality' is a choice not a necessity. You don't have to work with the concept, though you may choose to do so. One modest aim in writing the book was to make people and organizations think twice before using 'quality', to put a stutter (to use Nikolas Rose's metaphor) in the dominant narrative. We did not call for the concept to be abandoned; but rather for its use to be a deliberate choice, a political choice, made with an awareness that there are other ways of talking about what is important to us, ways that are more democratic and dialogic in assumption, value and practice.

We may have failed in this modest aim. 'Quality' continues to trip thoughtlessly off the individual and collective tongue, a constant refrain of the positivistic research that dominates the early childhood field, and saturating national and international policy documents. Reference to *Beyond Quality* is not to be found in such policy documents—no more, in fact, than you will find reference made to any other parts of the rich body of work being undertaken by the resistance movement. But such invisibility should not be mistaken for consensus. The unexpected success of this book is a sure sign of a vigorous movement, growing year by year, fed by the desire for new and varied approaches that reflect a world of diversity and complexity, welcome surprise and amazement, and value democracy and experimentation. Not only have we benefited from this vigour, but we hope to have contributed to it and to the hard work of contesting the mainstream narrative and reconceptualising early childhood education.

In wanting to be the only voice to be heard, in seeking to impose an unwarranted consensus, the dominant narrative drowns out and turns its own deaf ear to all other voices. We think this is dangerous, symptomatic of an ailing democratic politics of education. To restore its health requires a polyphony of voices and a capacity for listening. We are well content for *Beyond Quality* to be a part of that polyphony in a renewed democratic politics of education.

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13 August 2012

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Authors' introduction to the second edition

The first edition of this book was published seven years ago. It grew from our shared concern about the spread of the concept of quality in early childhood education. It seemed to us that this spread was accompanied neither by critical reflection nor by answers to what might be called the problem with quality: could the concept and practice of quality welcome and include context and values, subjectivity and multiple perspectives, complexity and uncertainty, participation and argumentation? And if so, how? Without convincing answers, quality seemed to lead down a dangerous road, contributing to two disturbing processes: the increasing standardization and regulation of modern life (which is accompanied by a rhetoric of individualism, diversity and choice) and the substitution of democratic politics by managerial practice (accompanied by a rhetoric of participation, listening and empowerment). In short, the age of quality seemed set to be the perfect complement to the society of control—quality control bringing control by quality.

To our surprise and pleasure, the book seems to have struck a global chord. The original English version of *Beyond Quality* has been reprinted six times, and is widely cited by authors from many countries. It has featured in online discussions and is required reading for a growing number of early childhood courses. It has also been translated into six languages: Catalan, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish.

One reason for this resonance may be that the book is part of a growing movement that is questioning and seeking alternatives to an increasingly dominant Anglo-American discourse on early childhood education and care. This discourse is instrumental in rationality, neoliberal in values, technical in practice and managerial in discipline. It tells a positivistic story of early childhood education and care as a technology that can help fix many faults in post-industrial society, without society having to address its underlying structural flaws of inequality, injustice and exploitation. In this story, quality plays a key part as guarantor of the technology, whose task is to deliver subjects made equally ready for the compulsory school system, having attained a set of predetermined outcomes or goals that indicate such readiness.

Yet despite this encouraging response to the first edition, there are many important parts in the early childhood field that *Beyond Quality* has not reached. We note reference to the book in OECD's report on that organization's thematic review of early childhood education and care in member states, a landmark achievement in comparative work (OECD, 2001). But generally we find few references to the book and its perspectives in the policy documents of international organizations or national governments. The book has still to make a widespread impact in North America, despite (as the endorsements reproduced in this edition show) having some following. This concerns us because, despite having early childhood policies and services that reflect badly on such wealthy societies, North America, and especially the United States, plays a significant part in shaping the global early childhood agenda, through its dominance in research and academic publishing and through the influence of American (neoliberal and positivistic) ways of thinking on international organizations (Penn, 2005). Overall, we see few signs of a more sceptical approach to the concept of quality—quality still crops up everywhere and remains as taken-for-granted as when we wrote the first edition.

So when we proposed a second edition of *Beyond Quality* to our publisher, we had in mind the opportunity to reach these and other parts of the early childhood field not yet engaged in critical reflection, but focused instead on developing technologies. For it seems to us that today we face a potentially disturbing prospect: of a growing early childhood field dominated by a technical search for a universal and stultifying 'best practice', to be evaluated through the concept of quality. It is our hope, therefore, that this edition will further stimulate debate and heighten awareness that we face choices that are, first and foremost, not technical but political, philosophical and ethical.

Re-viewing *Beyond Quality*

In 2002, an Italian version of *Beyond Quality* was translated and published in Italy by Reggio Children, the organization set up by the municipality of Reggio Emilia to support and manage the relationship between its municipal early childhood services and an increasing international interest in their pedagogical theories and practices. The introduction to the Italian translation forms the basis for Carlina Rinaldi's preface to this edition. We were delighted that Reggio Children found our interpretation of Reggio Emilia interesting enough to justify publication, while recognising that this did not imply complete agreement by Reggio Children with that interpretation and in particular with our argument that Reggio's pedagogical practice might be considered postmodern; as Rinaldi (2006) has subsequently said, 'Reggio may be postmodern in its perspectives, [but] we are not for postmodernism, because 'isms' are risky' (p. 182). But we were also intrigued that they had changed the book's subtitle: 'postmodern perspectives' in the English edition had become 'I linguaggi dell' valutazione'—'languages of evaluation'.

On reflection, we thought this a very good substitution, since it seemed to embody the argument at the heart of the book: that the concept of quality is one

particular discourse—or language—of evaluation, produced from within a particular paradigm (modernity) and inscribed with the values and assumptions of that paradigm, including the importance of universality, objectivity, certainty, stability and closure. The language of quality speaks of universal expert-derived norms and of criteria for measuring the achievement of these norms, quality being a measurement (often expressed as a number) of the extent to which services or practices conform to these norms. It calls for an autonomous observer to make a decontextualized and objective statement of fact.

The language of quality is not only a technology of normalization, establishing norms against which performance should be assessed, so shaping policy and practice. It is also a technology of distance, claiming to be able to compare performance anywhere in the world, irrespective of context. And it is a technology of regulation, providing a powerful tool for management to govern at a distance through the setting and measurement of norms of performance.

As we shall come back to discuss, we do not want to proscribe the language of quality. It may have its place; indeed, our postmodern perspectives warn us against the easy habit of dropping into dualistic (either/or) thinking. Rather *Beyond Quality* argues that there are other languages available for speaking about and practising evaluation. In the book, we offer an (not 'the') other language, aware that there will be others: it is a multi-lingual not a bi-lingual world. We call the language 'meaning making', a linguistic turn highlighted in the title of the book in its Swedish version—literally translated as 'From Quality to Meaning Making'. But it could go by other names, for example the language of participatory or dialogic evaluation.

The language of meaning making, we argue, is produced from within another paradigm: what we term postmodern, though perhaps today we would choose another term such as post-structural or even post-foundational. Like quality, meaning making is inscribed with certain values and assumptions derived from a particular paradigm, though very different to quality's: meaning making welcomes contextuality, values, subjectivity, uncertainty, and provisionality. The language of meaning making opens up to evaluation as a democratic process of interpretation, a process that involves making practice visible and thus subject to reflection, dialogue and argumentation, leading to a judgement of value, contextualized and provisional because it is always subject to contestation.

The two languages work with very different methods and tools. Quality relies on applying templates to situations, the templates embodying predefined norms and setting out criteria for their measurement. Rating scales, check lists, standardized protocols and procedures, detailed systems of inspection—these are the methods and tools of quality. Meaning making takes a quite different approach: it works with pedagogical documentation and reflection, and through listening.

This tool requires, first of all, making practice visible through many forms of documentation: written or recorded notes, the work produced by children, photographs or videos, the possibilities are many. Then it requires a collective process of interpretation, critique and evaluation, in which dialogue, reflection and

argumentation are important, and diversity and uncertainty treated as important values rather than weaknesses to be controlled for or eradicated. If the tools of quality involve a process of measurement to determine conformity to specification, pedagogical documentation is a process of research that leads to and values provisional and contestable conclusions.

Pedagogical documentation brings together a potent combination: actual practice, democratic deliberation and reflection. It can enable 'a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable' (Rose, 1999, p. 20). It can contribute to challenging dominant discourses, those ways of naming things and talking about them that make assumptions and values invisible, turn subjective perspectives and understandings into apparently objective truths and determine some things are self-evident and realistic while others are dubious and impractical, even inconceivable. In these ways, pedagogical documentation can help us to identify the practices through which we have constructed the image of the child, knowledge, learning and the environment, as well as how we have constructed ourselves as teachers, parents, students, researchers—and so open us to other possibilities.

This mixture—combining practice, democracy and reflection—had great appeal to Loris Malaguzzi, first pedagogical director of the early childhood services in Reggio Emilia, and one of the originators of pedagogical documentation as a tool of evaluation. His biographer describes how documentation is one of the keys to Malaguzzi's philosophy:

Behind this practice, I believe, is the ideological and ethical concept of a transparent school and transparent education . . . Documentation in all its different forms also represents an extraordinary tool for dialogue, for exchange, for sharing. For Malaguzzi it means the possibility to discuss and dialogue 'everything with everyone' . . . Sharing opinions by means of documentation presupposes being able to discuss real, concrete things, not just theories or words.

(Hoyuelos, 2004, p. 7)

Malaguzzi's successor, Carlina Rinaldi, further emphasizes the inclusive and democratic nature of pedagogical documentation: 'The reader [of documentation] can be children, parents, anyone who has participated or wants to participate in this process. The documentation material is open, accessible, usable'. Elsewhere, she contrasts documentation with evaluation tools more akin to those used for quality: 'I feel that recognising documentation as a possible tool for assessment/evaluation gives us an extremely strong 'antibody' to a proliferation of assessment/evaluation tools which are more and more anonymous, decontextualized and only apparently objective and democratic' (2006, p. 62).

Different languages of evaluation do not exist in isolation. Each finds its counterpart in a language for speaking about the child, workers in early childhood services and the services themselves. *Beyond Quality* precedes its discussion of

quality, meaning making and pedagogical documentation (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) with a discussion of different social constructions or understandings of early childhood and early childhood institutions (Chapters 3 and 4). We argue that these different constructions, like the different languages of evaluation, are produced from different paradigmatic positions.

Take the example of how early childhood institutions may be differently understood and how these differences influence approaches to evaluation. These institutions (we include services variously termed nurseries, day care centres, nursery classes or schools, preschools and kindergartens) can be understood as enclosures where technologies are applied to children to produce predetermined outcomes; this understanding is common in the Anglo-American discourse referred to earlier. Evaluation is then understood as a technical and managerial method that serves several purposes: to assess the effectiveness of different technologies in achieving prescribed outcomes; to measure whether services are applying technologies effectively and efficiently; and to provide some measure of accountability in terms of whether services meet targets, provide value for money and are fit for purpose. The service acts like a machine, and quality tells you if the machine is working well, providing evidence that purports to be objective and certain: nurseries evaluated as of good quality, for example, produce better developmental outcomes—a relationship we neither dispute nor find surprising, since modern pedagogical methods are both powerful and designed specifically to produce particular results.

But suppose you have another understanding of early childhood institutions. Suppose you understand them, for example as we discuss in *Beyond Quality*, as 'public forums situated in civil society in which children and adults participate together in projects of social, cultural, political and economic significance' (p. 73). These public forums with their wide range of projects have the potential for many and varied outcomes, the possibilities indeed are limitless. Some of these possibilities may be predetermined, but many will not be. For we cannot imagine all that can follow from the encounters that take place in these institutions and we want to be open to the surprising and unexpected—if you only ever look out for what you are expecting, if you only value preset targets, you miss a lot! Meaning making provides an approach to evaluation which opens you to new knowledge and insights, as well as enabling you to research and to learn about children's learning processes and perspectives and so improve pedagogical work. Like quality, it provides evidence, but in the form of documentation that then needs interpretation, acknowledging evidence to be open to different readings and conclusions.

Quality, therefore, tells you whether the institution-as-machine is working according to specification: is it producing objectives a, b and c? Meaning making helps you to understand and judge what possibilities the institution-as-complex organism may be realising: what is it producing? Quality means working with someone else's perspective, offered as objective truth. Meaning making requires developing one's own perspective, offered as rigorous subjectivity, but always

constructed in relationship with others. These different languages of evaluation place the evaluator in a very different relationship to practice: 'The value of subjectivity means that the subject must take responsibility for her or his point of view; there can be no hiding behind an assumed scientific objectivity or criteria offered by experts' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p. 16).

Does 'beyond quality' mean farewell to quality?

One of the dilemmas of trying to de-naturalize the language of quality—so that 'quality' can no longer be taken for granted as a neutral concept devoid of values or assumptions—and to differentiate it from another language such as meaning making, is that the process may set up binary oppositions. The impression may be given that you must either go with quality or with meaning making, that there are good guys and bad guys. This may have been a consequence of our book, but if so it was unintended. We end Chapter 5 by recognising a continuing place for both languages of evaluation and, more broadly, for early childhood work to adopt different perspectives produced from different paradigmatic positions.

That remains our position today. We defend the right to adopt different perspectives and languages—but with the important proviso that 'all those engaged with early childhood and early childhood institutions recognize that there are different perspectives, that the work we do (whether as practitioners or parents or policy makers or researchers) always takes a particular perspective—and that therefore choices—or judgements of value—are always being made from which flow enormous implications in terms of theory and practice' (p. 119). Others may take a different position to us, indeed actively disagree with our position, and that presents us with no intrinsic problem: we can argue while still respecting, we can reach across the paradigmatic divide.

What does present a problem, indeed we find deeply unacceptable, is when others take a position as if no choice were involved, as if their position was the only one. Unfortunately, this is all too common among both researchers and policy makers. Journal articles in the early childhood field frequently show no recognition of the authors' positioning and its implications for the defining of questions in research and evaluation, the choice of methods and the interpretation of data. While there is today a sort of standard policy document, produced by governments and international organizations, which offers a predictable rationale and prescription for early childhood education and care, drawing on the same much-quoted research, without providing so much as one critical question or recognising that there may be different perspectives and understandings.

Not only do these documents make dull and repetitive reading. They stifle democracy. Political and ethical choices are replaced by technical specifications, often legitimated by positivistic research studies that on closer examination fail to convince once account is taken of context and complexity (see, for example, Penn et al. (2006) for a critique of the relevance of several US-based studies frequently

cited, by a variety of organizations and countries, as justifying public funding of early childhood services on cost-benefit grounds).

But we are also more aware today than when we wrote *Beyond Quality* that the choices we make require far more than simply stating a preference. Working with the language of meaning making is difficult. It needs, or at least is greatly facilitated by, certain conditions: commitment to particular values, such as uncertainty, subjectivity, democracy; creativity, curiosity and a desire to experiment and border cross; a reflective, researching and socially valued workforce; and sustained support from critical friends (for example, the *pedagogistas* or pedagogical coordinators in Reggio Emilia, who work closely and deeply with a small number of centres), networks of services, policy makers and politicians. Such conditions, we agree, are not widespread; and where they are lacking, it may be necessary to use the language of quality, which is far easier to learn and speak, requiring the capacity to follow instructions and apply techniques correctly.

The decision to work with quality should, however, be viewed as a political choice made in a particular temporal and spatial context. The choice should be accompanied by recognition that alternatives exist and by a view about future directions. Quality may be the right choice to make here and now, but is it the language of choice for 10 or 15 years hence? If yes, then what is the rationale for this stasis? And what are the dangers of staying with a language that is so strongly related to criteria and standards, that is so powerfully normalising and regulatory, that results in exclusion and lack of diversity? If no, if the intention is to learn and speak another language over time, or to become multi-lingual, then what conditions need putting in place, how will the transition be achieved? Will it be a general top-down change or will it be led by individual centres or networks of centres choosing to take up meaning making (or some other language of evaluation)? What norms and criteria will remain, even after these changes, since we think it is likely that even in the most decentralized and experimental system, there will remain some normative framework, setting down some common values, principles, objectives and entitlements?

Seven years after the first edition of *Beyond Quality*, we are still trying to find a relationship between different languages, one which is based on respect, recognition of the need for contextual judgement and the dynamic nature of the relationship. However, we want to make it clear that the recognition of different perspectives and a reluctance to close down possibilities through setting up either/or choices does not mean that we take no position, that we accept an uncritical relativism. To have a perspective means that you take a position, and we have chosen ours.

We believe, as a political and ethical choice, that the early childhood institution should be understood and developed as a public institution, a forum and a children's space, a site for encounter and relating, where children and adults meet and commit to something, where they can dialogue, listen and discuss in order to share meanings. We think that as such, it has the potential for an infinite range of possibilities—cultural, linguistic, social, aesthetic, ethical, political and

economic—some expected and predetermined, but many that are not; and that it can play an important role in the renewal of democracy through foregrounding democratic practice in all aspects of its life and work. Further, we believe that the language of meaning making—or democratic evaluation—is the form of evaluation that reflects the democratic and participatory values of such an institution and which is best able to deepen understanding and construct complex judgements of value. The language of quality may have its place, but from our perspective that place should be carefully defined and subject to regular review, treating it as a temporary measure for temporary conditions.

A nice cover but a difficult book?

Some have said that *Beyond Quality* is a difficult book, others that it is not difficult but challenging. As authors, we are perhaps not best placed to comment on how readers will find the book. We hope it is not unnecessarily obscure or opaque, due to poor writing. We have tried hard to explain what might be unfamiliar concepts and ideas, rather than assume the reader will know. We hope, therefore, that it is not difficult, but accept it may prove challenging. Indeed, arguably it should be challenging if by that we mean asking the reader to question established ideas and to think differently.

The idea of paradigm is central to the book and to the challenge it may present to the reader. To those unfamiliar with this idea, it can be exciting, but also confusing, to be asked to recognize that there may be different ways of seeing and understanding the world. It may be liberating, but also unsettling, to consider that what was taken for granted may be just one of many possibilities—that, for example, there may be no essential child but many images of the child constructed in different contexts; that predetermined outcomes may not be the only or even the main purpose of early childhood institutions; that ‘quality’ may be a problem and a choice rather than an unquestioned necessity.

The book may also be challenging for the related reason that it works with theories and concepts that have been unfamiliar to the early childhood field, which (at least in the Anglo-American world) has had a rather narrow diet based on a few staples mainly drawn from the field of child development. Not only does *Beyond Quality* critique some influential strands in the discipline of child development (though, we readily accept, it is far from original in doing so), but it draws extensively on the thinking of a number of post-structural thinkers, mostly French, who never (as far as we know) paid any attention in their own work to early childhood—Levinas, Derrida, Deleuze and, most important for this book, Foucault. In the last 15 years, and especially the last decade, their work has attracted increasing interest in the field, both in research and practice (though, once again, policy makers seem to show no recognition of this development). For they open up to new thinking about ethics, learning, knowledge, power and relationships.

However, despite this growing interest, such theorists are hardly mainstream and appear, we would hazard a guess, rarely on courses and course reading lists.

Some of them are difficult to read, in part because their written language can be dense. They are also challenging because they confront the reader with new perspectives on the world and on relationships, which are often highly provocative, disorientating and unsettling. Can it really be the case that I cannot stand outside power relations? Does my daily practice really contribute to creating the child as a particular type of subject? Am I governing myself by embodying dominant discourses in my thinking and practice? Does my attempt to take a holistic or whole child approach implicate me in more effective management of the child, through 'governing the soul'? Does my pedagogical practice, with its system of concepts and classifications, have the effect of grasping the child and making this other into the same? And if this is so, what possibilities are there for resistance? What would be involved in an ethical relationship of openness to the Other, to think an Other whom I cannot grasp?

So, yes the book may be challenging, at least in parts. We hope though that for some or even many readers the hard work required will prove worthwhile, by opening to new possibilities and perspectives. We hope, too, that *Beyond Quality* will also prove in some cases a relief and comfort. For one reason for the worldwide interest aroused by the book may be that it gives some voice to the concerns and unease of many people at the direction early childhood services are taking in many countries, under the influence of what we have called the dominant Anglo-American discourse.

It is in the nature of dominant discourses that they lay claim to truth, and seek to set boundaries on what people can think, question and practice. Everything within these boundaries becomes natural, self evident, taken for granted, everything outside is ignored or dismissed as untrue, unrealistic or unimaginable. But *Beyond Quality*, with its postmodern perspectives, treats the dominant early childhood discourse as constructed and perspectival, a local discourse, produced and at home within one small part of the world, which is attempting global hegemony. The book offers another discourse—not the only alternative, but one alternative which demonstrates that we face choice not necessity. Hopefully, this can prove emancipatory, making the challenging bits worth the effort.

Beyond Beyond Quality

Since *Beyond Quality* was published in 1999, the three of us have continued to develop the book's ideas and perspectives. Gunilla Dahlberg has been working on different research projects in Sweden. In one, called 'children's dialogue with nature', she is exploring a paradigm of ethics and aesthetics; while in another, 'multiculturalism and communication', she is researching a pedagogy of welcoming and hospitality built on listening.

Peter Moss has written about different understandings of institutions for children, including but not only those for early childhood, exploring in particular the concept of 'children's spaces' (Moss and Petrie, 2002). Gunilla and Peter have worked together on editing a book series, *Contesting Early Childhood*, which

includes books about working with Foucauldian theory in early childhood services (MacNaughton, 2005), the theory and practice of pedagogical work in Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi, 2006), inequality in the lives of young children especially in poor countries (Penn, 2005), and ethics and politics in early childhood education (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). This last book follows directly from *Beyond Quality*, which raised the importance of ethics and introduced the work of Emmanuel Levinas, which forms a major part of the new book.

Alan Pence came to *Beyond Quality* primarily through his work with indigenous communities in Canada and through early childhood care and development activities in the Majority World. Much of his work has focused on creating approaches to tertiary education that resist colonial mentalities and open up to diverse and local understandings as voices that are critical to establishing community appropriate, sustainable programmes for children. Sixteen years of work with the First Nations Partnerships Program (<http://www.fnpp.org/>) is addressed in a recent book (Ball and Pence, 2006). He has also worked extensively in Africa and the Middle East, focusing on capacity building, leadership promotion and network enhancement through working with country-identified leaders in early childhood in the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU) programme (<http://www.ecdvu.org/>). He is currently preparing a co-edited volume on early childhood care and development in Africa.

This work, and the changes we have seen since 1999, have deepened our affection for *Beyond Quality* and left us feeling more confident in the importance and relevance of what it has to say. It is a book of commitment and caution. We welcome the increased interest in and provision of early childhood education and care. But we are with Foucault (1974) when he says everything is dangerous and that 'the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent' (p. 171).

The concept of quality appears both neutral and benign, self-evidently a good thing. Yet, our argument is that it is value-ridden and dangerous, especially when deployed as part of a narrowly conceived yet powerfully implemented approach to early childhood, which seeks to govern the child through normalization, technical practice and instrumental rationality. We hope this new edition of *Beyond Quality* will enable more people to adopt a critical perspective towards quality, while at the same time opening up to new understandings, not only of evaluation but of children and the institutions that society provides for them.

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