

## Monocultural constructs: a transnational reflects on early childhood institutions

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At the varying systemic levels for children in pre-schooling, early schooling and care, and at the adult levels in undergraduate and postgraduate education, early childhood education is currently undergoing change. A first step is recognition of the problematics of diverse values, diverse languages, and diverse religions. A second step is awareness of the positive possibilities in these. Hence policy documents begin to write in the Other (Rhedding-Jones, 2002a), although postmodern effects of multiplicities may fail to transform the original monoculture. In practice, local settings determine which teachers and which institutions will develop pedagogies and assessments differently (Rhedding-Jones, 2002b). Here the critical issues are the ethnicities of the clientele and the staff, the prevailing ideologies of social justice, and the economic rationalism of the controlling committees. The essay presents the reflections of a foreigner as researcher. Having migrated to Norway from Australia in 1997, and now having early childhood education work experiences in both countries, I write theoretically and anthropologically. The reflected institutions are pre-schools and day care centres, and undergraduate and postgraduate higher education for early childhood pedagogy.

### Local and theoretical introductions

Making the majority rather than the minority the problem, regarding ethnicities, citizenships and nations, is somewhat like the feminist practice of making the problem patriarchy instead of always focusing on women. With feminism, the problems associated with patriarchal institutions and individuals showed few signs of diminishing until men themselves began to take up the problems of their own masculinities (Askland and Sataøen, 1998; Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghail, 1994). This essay points to the need for majority cultures to rethink, and then to act upon the effects of their own positionings. That the them-us split is not as simple as it sounds is quite apparent to anyone who has ever had a foot in two camps. Being doubly positioned, or being differently interracial are thus two possibilities. Others possibilities are transformations of cultural practices, or their total rupturing. As it is, we quite often have nominal integrations, which in effect operate as unnamed assimilations all over again.

The essay has developed from reflections on my own teaching and practice supervision, as an Australian working in Norwegian early childhood education. Here I attempt to work for ethnic minorities and against racism. Writing from my own positionality since I began teaching/supervising in Norwegian, blurred when necessary with English, I now present an essay dealing with the practices and policies of early childhood institutions. With it I take my reflections beyond the everyday and into the theoretical. Underlying this is the desire for political change for the benefit of minorities. Viewed as constructors of culture, accordingly, the pre-school's play, spoken and written language and pedagogical practices may then be seen as constructing not the multiple but the singular. In this case the singularity is white



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(Hage, 1998), monolingual, middle class Norway (although of course no culture can ever be entirely singular).

Rather than developing its arguments only by reason, my essay unfolds theoretically (after Deleuze, 1993), with some exemplifications from documents and everyday events, as traces for readers' further deconstructings of (their own) cultural practices (following Spivak, 1999). My hope is for the eventual reconstructings of what happens with young children, their carers and teachers, and the lecturers involved in higher education. Questions thus informing and arising from the essay are: What constructs the monocultural? How can such constructs be seen and heard? Who is able to reconstruct their culturally singular practices, values and theories?

A major construct of culture, and of an individual's position in relation to it, is language. Yet following meanings, by reading, happens for literate foreigners fairly quickly. Understanding by listening is more difficult. Constructing meanings, by talking and much later by writing, happens with enormous difficulty. Yet until the new language is able to be utilised, the monolingual nature of the other country is a brick wall barrier to cultural contact and understanding. Because of this, an important pedagogical step in Oslo, with five-year-old children and their parents (mothers actually), is to immerse them in the language and cultural practices of the host country (Norway). While this strategy has undoubted positive effects, in that the children do learn to speak and understand Norwegian, it also has some negatives. One of these is the denial of the languages the children bring to their pre-schooling encounters from their differently cultural households. In learning to use Norwegian, these children also learn that the home language with which they are familiar and highly skilled, carries no status or power in this new Norwegian context (*Ungdommens Mediesenter*, 1998). What they will need for the schooling they will be confronted with the following year, as six year olds, is Norwegian, and apart from the recommended five minutes a day of English, Norwegian only.

Furthermore, at the five pre-schools in central Oslo where this linguistic development is in operation, there are only 5% of ethnic Norwegian children in attendance. This means that the children of non-Norwegian ethnicity are denied play contact with the child members of the dominant culture, and must learn their (Norwegian) play and language from the adults who teach and care for them. These adults, apart from the leaders, comprise mostly ethnic minorities themselves, but speak only Norwegian in the pre-schools. So although bodies and clothes may be represented differently (Blacks, people of colour, foreign accents, foreign clothes) the foreign languages are rarely to be heard. Neither, presumably, are foreign games, ways of interacting and generally conducting oneself. (I deliberately use the word 'foreign', which I here apply to myself, taking my lead from Kristeva, 1991, and Derrida, 1998.)

As an always already positioned writer, I am stating the case of the monocultural to deconstruct the discourses of monoculturalism, operating in the face of supposed multiculturalism. I do so rather than record implicit truth through carefully gathered data (Reinharz, 1992; 214-239). With this essay, which claims only to reflect and to begin to theorise, what I hope to have happen is an opening of critical consciousness. If we are to reconstruct the culture where we ourselves are of the majority (as am I in Australia but not in Norway), then we must know about the difficulties of having to learn the language of the other, of the new ways of conducting yourself in public, of living up to the majority's cultural expectations.

Stating the case theoretically, and linking the above to recent publications, I now restate the politics of naming and critiquing (the monocultural). Here the exemplification regards literacy. Lingard (2000; 89) names Australia's underpinning monoculturalism as 'opposed to a multicultural theorising of multiliteracies necessary to effective citizenship in a globalised world'. If we continue to emphasise one language only for children's development of reading and writing, then these children become disadvantaged in today's world (2000; 89). This



applies regardless of which language the children speak at home. It also applies to the evaluation or assessment of children's spoken and written language skills/arts. Assuming that lack of skill in the language of the dominant is lack of skill in 'language', and 'testing' accordingly, demonstrates not only monocultural assumptions. It demonstrates also a lack of awareness of the development and functions of language(s) (Halliday, 1985). Thus the so-called literacy crisis, where many minority children are labelled as underachievers, may be categorised as 'rearticulated monoculturalism'. Lingard calls this monocultural view (of the multicultural) an 'abuse'. Although he writes here only of literacy, what he says could be applied more widely, as all curriculum areas and all social interactions are culturally constructed. Here a Norwegian example is the notion of *kompetanse*, so crucial to the completion of coursework, the getting of jobs, and 'good' grades and evaluations. For 0-5 year olds, the all-important quality desired by the discourses of Norwegian pre-schooling is *sosial kompetanse*, as construed by Norwegians (R-96, 1995), and others such as me, coerced by institutions.

It can thus be said that the articulations of monoculturalism may categorise ethnic minority children and adults as incompetent. This is in practice further qualified as 'developmental', 'social' and 'professional'. Hence language, domestic habits and public celebrations are not the only culturally constructed outcomes of racial and religious diversities, citizenships and the effects of media and migrations. For pre-school education and care this raises major problems regarding what it is that 'ought' to be happening. Is it the home and the parenting of the dominant culture or the minority cultures that should be being replicated? To what extent should or could they blur? Do dominant culture professionals hear, see and taste only their own cultural positionings? How are they to find other practices that are possible and desirable? Who will move out when minorities move in?

Theories of construction (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; 55, 149) hold that things do not just happen. Always something is being made up, put together, re-done, reconstructed (Cannella, 1997). With these theories, the emphasis is on the *with*: the *con* part of the word. This implies collaboration, working together, social arrangement. What is constructed may be an activity, a building or a culture; and these may also be re-constructed, or constructed again, differently. A theory of construction, of the social and the cultural, is not quite the same as a theory of socialisation (Davies, 1990). With socialisation, the people being socialised are made social, through interactions with other people. With construction theories, the people whose subject positions change are active themselves in choosing the change process collaborations. Thus constructions of a culture happen because of group agency, though this is not likely at the time to be apparent to the people acting agentically. For researchers, a useful unravelling tool or methodology here is deconstruction (Rhedding-Jones, 2005c). Unlike destructive criticism, deconstructive analysis may work with and for the culture it studies. In doing so it is a positive political practice, as it allows for new meanings to later be built up, and new practices and theories to evolve (Rhedding-Jones, 1995; 1996; 2001).

If we deconstructively say that the culture that is being constructed is mostly monocultural, we say so to emphasise the enacted singularity, to silently query the normalisation of the multicultural. In part this is a shock tactic: to assert the inadequacy of the rhetoric of multiculturalism. Yes, we have visible diversity in pre-schools (Rhedding-Jones, 2005b), you can see children of colour. But do we have diversity of languages? What do the bilingual assistants in the pre-schools and schools actually speak? Whose songs are they actually singing? Whose sleep patterns are being followed? Who has decided that the weather conditions are suitable for outdoor play? What food are people eating and is this thought about as a cultural construct? Whose home does the day care centre look like, and whose does it not? Which religion is assumed to be normal? (Jacobsen, 2000) Whose pre-school is it?

The next sections of the essay deal with terms important theoretically to the above. In sequence these are: globalisation and race; ethnicity and culture; language and self; postnationalism and transnationalism (Gough, 2004). Each of these includes some early childhood education examples and anecdotes, some everyday English and some of my own voice. After that the essay focuses more specifically on theorising the monocultural, then on the relevant early childhood institutions.

As a note to end this section on local and theoretical introductions I would point out that the term curriculum is not used in the Norwegian language. I shall not here go into the details of the North European split between *pedagogikk* and *didakikk* (Hamilton, 2000; Rhedding-Jones, 2003). Suffice to say that *didakikk* is more like curriculum. As I am employed as professor in *pedagogikk*, I interpret that as education. In pre-schooling there is, in Anglo understanding, a curriculum. The children and their teacher-carers follow pedagogical agendas, which may be separate from the beginnings of disciplines (like music, mathematics and language). They thus play in particular ways, have particular conversations and engage with particular objects and people. This essay is thus not strictly speaking about curriculum inquiry. Rather it is about the discourses constructing it. Here the nationally utilised Framework Plan (R-96), as a curriculum document in the Anglo understanding of the term, is not taking into account some of the discourses I point to here.

## Globalisation and race

Although I have localised Norway, today's 'locality is no longer what it used to be'. In practice and in theory 'every similarity hides more than one difference', and 'similarities and differences conceal one another indefinitely' (Appadurai, 1996; 11). Following Appadurai, this essay engages with discourses of a globalisation which is 'not the story of cultural homogenization'. I thus point out the functioning of the homogenised monocultural, to say what it is that hinders the constructions of transnationalisms and postnationalisms, in particular for early childhood educations. To quote Appadurai (1996; 158): 'We need to think ourselves beyond the nation.' For Norway, seeing only the neighbouring nations of Denmark and Sweden is not to see far enough (OECD, 1999a; 37-38). Knowing that the children represent and reconstruct their own complex postnational identities is the knowledge required for today's teachers. To this knowledge must be added the appropriately transformed pedagogies, linguistic practices and, not least, transformed teacher-carers.

As Appadurai has pointed out, globalisation is marked by 'unprecedented movement of peoples, technologies and informations across previously impermeable borders - from one location to another' (Ghandi; 1998: 125). So four year olds get on a plane to visit grandparents in Bosnia during the Norwegian summer. Bilingual assistants in the pre-schools check out the Internet in their lunch times to read their local news in their home languages, via the BBC. The early childhood lecturer goes off to international conferences in New Orleans, London and Sydney to speak in English about what happens in Oslo (Rhedding-Jones, 2000a; b; c). Yet working and reconceptualising transnationally, as done by immigrants, goes often unnoticed by locals, who themselves may travel and speak English when abroad, but whose notion of home positions them singularly.

Critiquing multiculturalism then, following Stuart Hall, is to locate and to site 'the convenient Othering and exoticisation of ethnicity' (Ghandi; 1998; 126). Hence Diwali may get a mention in the schools and as a kind of substitute Christmas; and bacon impregnated cheese may be understood by pre-school teachers as a factory processed removal of responsibility for the eating habits of Hindu, Jewish and Muslim children. In these ways the hegemony of mainstream Norwegian culture, with its discourses of normalisation easily concealing Christians and carnivores, continues uncritiqued. Ethnicity gets to mean the



qualities of others but not of oneself. This lack of self-critique perpetuates attitudes to the 'always-already' marginal (Ghandi, 1998; 126).

Following Stuart Hall (1993, in Luke and Luke, 1999; 238) the certainties and assumptions of the past now face 'New Times'. These are characterised firstly by the emergence of the newly seen ethnicities of minorities and the indigenous. Secondly they are characterised by the 'reassertion of monocultural nationalism' (Luke and Luke, p. 238). Thus, as Clifford Geertz has said (1986, in Robertson, 1995; 39), 'like nostalgia, diversity is not what it used to be'. Taking a critical perspective, diversity may now be seen as 'the principle which allows all locals to stick to their respective cultures' (Hannerz, 1990, in Robertson, 1995; 29). Hence a more productive focus may be cultural pluralism (Robertson, p. 31), which allows for the conditions of its production and construction. My focus on the monocultural is thus an attempt to show what pluralities are not. As Robertson points out, 'the idea of locality, indeed of globality, is very relative'. For this essay, my own cultural relativities shine through. My hope is that these function to indicate relativities other than mine. But a growing problem is: what happens when the dominant culture wants to stop a minority culture's normalised practices, on the basis of majority ethics?

Because ethnicity has been over-used in census and governmental documentation, and because race is usually erased in identity politics, Luke and Luke (1999; 235-7) choose instead to accentuate it. When whiteness goes unmarked in Caucasian cultures, and when ethnicity is seen as belonging only to 'the other', then the politics of naming 'race' avoids the naming of birthplace as the supposed location of identity. Eventually providing children with an affirming politics of identity, by allowing for complex blends of resistance and agency regarding majority, minorities and hybridity, requests not only new pedagogies but new epistemological practices. Going beyond collective racialisation means going beyond black-white dichotomies, beyond Asian-European divisions, beyond linguistic categories related to skin colour: beyond the notion of nations to realities of transnationals. Seeing children in the light of this is then not to think in terms of classifying them, of having cultural expectations and wanting normalisations. Applied not only to the children of others, but also to the children of the monoculture, this requests imagining futures across languages, nations and races. In short, it alters our present, by attempting to come to terms with increasingly interracial families, students and populations. This is an opposite of asking for a renewed emphasis on racist discourses, via the essentialism of past practices. Hence African, Middle Eastern, Asian and European no longer operate as essentially homogenised. Despite this, the notion of *home* may continue to construct a singular location, a singular culture. Seen from this perspective, there are only monocultures. I shall take up this theory further into the essay, in the section on monoculture.

## Ethnicity and culture

A quick glance at the listed names of the people doing the lecturing in higher education (in Oslo, Norway) will show you that these names are not reflecting the linguistic and citizenship histories of the children in the schools and pre-schools. Few minority parents take their (pre)school children skiing at the weekends and after school, yet this is a skill to be mastered by all teacher-students compulsorily studying Physical Education. No place here for Arabic dancing or Indian meditation; Norwegian norms rule. Similarly, ethnic minority children in institutionalised (pre)schooling go out to play on the ice; so many ethnic minority parents decide to keep their children warm at home.

Inequality is not, I think, the crucial question; and nor is equity the crucial answer. Imperative instead is what to do with difference, and how to value it, nurture it without condescension, and allow for its shifts. There is no doubt that well-meaning teachers, carers and administrators would like to value all children equally, and cater for their differences. At



least this is how the rhetoric and the curriculum documentation goes (R-96, 1995), and this is what teacher-students, pre-school administrators and lecturers will tell you. Words, however, are not enough. The construction of (mono)cultures happens not by words alone, but by words remaining unsaid, by non-verbals, by the (non)sharing of time and personal space, by (not) taking up the practices and some of the values of others. Here then are the intermeshed politics of power and positioning.

Robertson (1996; 13) describes culture as a matter of group identity ‘constituted by some differences among others’. Taking culture broadly and in everyday understanding, women can be seen to have their own cultures that are different from men’s; being straight is another culture from being gay; being part of a kid-culture stops at adolescence. So the term monocultural could be broadened a little, to include also one-eyed cultures related to gender, age and ability (Rhedding-Jones, 2000a). Hence writing about ethnicities, races and languages may also be read as applying to cultures unbounded by histories of countries, wars and flags. These include complex blends of genders and races, religions and languages, disabilities and ethnicities.

Ethnicity is ‘the idea of naturalized group identity’ (Appadurai, 1996; 13). This idea of ethnicity ‘takes the conscious and imaginative construction and mobilization of differences as its core’ (1996; 14). This is not then the old idea of ethnicity, where the ‘primordial idea of kinship... is in turn biological and genealogical’ (1996; 14). Instead, ethnicity is seen as ‘value-relational’ (1996; 14). This allows for new constructions of individual and group identities, related to cultures and languages yet also involving the agencies of subjects. This takes further Richard Jenkins’ arguments and explorations of ethnicity (Jenkins, 1997) not as the exoticised other, nor as a them in opposition to an us. For early childhood education to here pick up on the theories, would require the elimination of everyday notions of ethnic differentiation: the bridging and technologising of notions/nations of fixedness.

Appadurai uses the term ‘culturalism’ to focus on the effects usually attached to prefixes such as *bi* and *multi*. I am stressing the prefix *mono*; but culturalism itself requires attention. After Appadurai (1996) culturalism is an ‘identity politics mobilized at the level of the nation-state’. In my case this is Norway, with the nation-state of Australia acting as informant. (My forming practices were in Australia, as I taught and cared for children aged 3-8, then lectured and examined in higher education.) This essay is thus consciously shaped by my own emerging awareness of diaspora, deterritorialisation and the differences between two nationally constructed pedagogies. Regarding my professional practices for early childhoods and for related higher educations in Australia and in Norway, I would point out that neither nation has a unified practice. Further, I am not claiming to be accurately representing a nation regarding its ethnicities and its cultures.

## Language and self

The experience of speaking a foreign language is the experience of knowing that: ‘To speak in the desired way is, from now on, to also learn to speak against oneself.’ (Ghandi, 1998; 13). Said in relation to this essay, this is the knowledge that the culture that owns the language decides who you, yourself, are able to be. Coming to own another language is thus what the experience of immigration, your own or those of your family earlier, is about. Turkish Norwegian and Vietnamese English do not simply imply the learning of English or Norwegian by the Turks and the Vietnamese. These learnings imply the learnings of new becomings, the forsakings and the transformings of the past of a people. For individuals this is sometimes painful, slow, regressive and undesired. For cultural and linguistic majorities having no such experience, the process of imagined or partial homogenisation that other people undergo is unseen and unimagined. For those us being (partly) homogenised, the questions regard costs and benefits: why act like the Norwegians?



In this section of the essay I bring in a critical and self-reflexive account of cultural nationalism in relation to language. The nation I have in mind, and which has me by the throat, is Norway. Here I speak differently, act like a puppet, feel stressed, try to teach. My students are white Norwegian women, with very few exceptions. Ditto my colleagues. What I read in my spare time however, is eclectic text in English. Through this I learn, write and reconstruct my self. In getting into postcolonial theory (Gandhi, 1998; Spivak, 1999), I realise that Norway is neither colony nor colonised, at least in the usual sense. Yet I make use of such theory, along with the theories with which I am more familiar: the feminist poststructuralist (Rhedding-Jones; 1995; 1996; 2005c). Applied to language and self these combined sets of theories produce histories and deconstructions for the key concepts of nationalisms and institutionalisms, globalisation and culture.

For Norwegians the experience of linguistic difference may stop at the dialect differences between the metropolitan centre (of Oslo) and the rural peripheries. Yet ‘waves of voluntary and unwanted migrations continue to challenge the cultural and demographic stability’ (Ghandi, 1998; 134) of the Norwegian world. Migration, along with the bringing in of languages of difference rather than simply dialects of difference, has little impact on the work of majority of professionals. This is because it is the so-called ‘non-professional’ work that is usually done by migrants. Where I work we hear Urdu whilst the floors are being cleaned, but not as the children play in the pre-schools. Although I speak English if I want to be deviant, my position is one of relative power. The following is a record of an unusual event in higher education in 2000. Since then there have been some changes.

*18 August, (journal notes)*

*A 100% white audience listens to the African Norwegian woman addressing them from the lectern. Her topic is “Hvordan få flerkulturell rekruttering til lærerutdanning?”. (This translates as ‘How to get multicultural recruiting into teacher education?’) The speaker’s name is Manuela Ramin-Osmundsen, and she is the Leader for the Centre Against Ethnic Discrimination, in Oslo. ‘What is it that hinders minorities?’ she asks (and I translate). ‘How do we get out of the situation where fully qualified Doctors are washing the floors? Who are today’s students? Who wants a higher education that is different?’ We, her audience of early childhood educators, some 60 of us together with a similar number from late childhood education, listen for the allocated hour. Afterwards I skip the provided meat lunch, suffering the after effects of self-identification, the alienation of not knowing the words to Norway’s national songs, not getting the jokes, never breathing in the Australian ocean.*

My own positionality is complex. On the one hand I am the ‘feminist-as-imperialist’ (Ghandi, 1998; 83), using my status and higher education experiences to advantage. On the other hand I share much with the ‘third-world’ woman (Ghandi; 1998; 83), at least from my point of view as a sometimes lonely disempowered immigrant. Obviously there is no ‘real me’; and just as obviously there are possibilities beyond the metaphorical hands on which I have just counted. Similarly Manuela, speaking English with me instead of her native French, defies the categories, understands my angst, laughs at the Norwegian weather. She’s not eating the lunch either.

In language the practices of a singular culture are not only reflected but ongoingly constructed by a singular set of values. ‘This is the language we speak and the food we eat, here, in this workplace, in this household, at this school,’ is the unspoken message accompanying whatever is actually being said/eaten. ‘All persons not speaking this language, and not speaking it according to our set of values regarding its linguistic conventions, vocal intonations and cultural rules of when to say what, must then become the not us’. Maintaining past practices of exclusions of foreigners, the poor, the rural, the hearing impaired, the very



young, the Down syndromed, allows for dominant groups to impose their semantic sounds and spellings on others. This ensures the continued cultural capital of those in power. As hegemonic effects, particular people are not invited to the dominant ethnicity's private events, not offered high status jobs, not allowed to pass exams, not able to earn as much money as those whose language, and its valued variables, dominate.

Through language, spoken and written, the singular culture asserts its supremacy by stopping the audible and visual representations of difference. That language itself is about the makings of meanings (Halliday, 1985) and the communications between people become lost in the power plays of whose meanings count in particular societies. In monocultures, two-way communications with minorities are not desired. As an ideology, this will not be said, will not be written into institutional policy, will not be known by those engaged in the practices of normalisation. What is required, to change the continued constructings of the monocultural via language, is a working knowledge of language function, of positioning because of difference and/or of courage to deviate from normalised practices. For Norway, which acts like all nations which have accepted immigrants and refugees, by colonising them, the normalisation of linguistic and cultural power infiltrates institutions, social gatherings and even conversations between two people. Colonising in this sense involves not the take-over of land but of ways of being and speaking.

### **Postnationalism and transnationalism**

Despite majority cultures, minorities link themselves to each other, not only to people within the nation to which they or their earlier generations migrated. These complexities remain usually unseen by majorities, who appear to assume that their culture is all that an immigrant's offspring knows and is skilled in. In fact there is a double richness: that of the earlier home country and the people who remain there as outsiders; and that of the related ethnicities within the domains of the majority, as urban ghettos or enclaves. Thus ethnic minorities also link globally and locally, in ways unimagined by majority cultures. Further, public and private transnational movements, technologies and families exist through virtual and actual proximities and frequent contact. So the Sri Lankan Tamil whose child attends the Norwegian pre-school, and the Somali assistant in early schooling have worlds way beyond the monocultural knowledge of most Norwegians.

That these worlds are under-utilised by early childhood institutions is clearly seen when minority children, teachers and parents are defined as problems not resources: deficient not multi-abled. In these ways a national state, as a homogenous rather than a heterogenous unit (Appadurai, 1996; 23), blocks the institutional emergence of transnational identities, practices and institutions. In other words, children may be as transnational as they like at home and if they travel out of Norway, but not in Norwegian institutions. For early childhood education this continued blinkering by mono-encultured teachers, carers and lecturers blocks any possible reconstructions, at least outside the home.

It seems from the above that transnationals are people who go across the divides, to transform their earlier nations, cultures and ethnicities through their own individually enacted identities and practices. Postnationalism, as a more theoretical term naming the reconstructions of nations, acts to bridge and transform the old divide of Westerner and native (Ghandi; 1998; 124). Presumably this includes the newer divide of North and South, though in my case as a Southerner (from Australia), moving to The North (Norway's etymology is the way to the north) is in many ways a retrograde step. As examples: the pay for senior academics, in relation to the cost of living and Australia, is much lower; research cultures remain almost fixedly local and monolingual; early childhood education goes international if it transgresses the boundaries by little trips to pre-schools in Sweden or Denmark.





Related theoretically to postnationalism and transnationalist practices are the twin terms of hybridity and diaspora. Hybridity is the notion of ‘in-between-ness’ (Ghandi, 1998; 131). Diaspora is sometimes used interchangeably with migration, as a ‘theoretical device for the interrogation of ethnic identity’ (Ghandi; 1998; 131). Ghandi says that diasporic thought ‘betrays its poststructural origins by contesting all claims to the stability of meaning and identity’ (1998; 131). Not in everyday language then, hybridity and diaspora or blendings and scatterings, are uncovered by postnational readings of global encounters (Ghandi, 1998; 129). This alludes to the more theoretical aspects of researching within the postmodern. As I see (pre)schooling (in Norway) and its related higher education, the ‘transnational destabilization’ (Appadurai, 1996; 178) of the monocultural, via hybridity and diaspora of practices has yet to emerge (OECD, 1999b). When it does, what it will represent is ‘the mutual transformation of coloniser and the colonised’ (Ghandi, 1998; 125. In this case the colonising has been done by the monocultural constructs of language, play, eating, celebrating, employing, assessing and befriending. In these ways the constructs operate through the sharing of work and power.

## Monoculture

Historically the notion of a monoculture is quite impossible. All cultures have constructed themselves because of the effects of migrations past. Wandering tribes, conquering heroes, raping vandals: all of these are the stuff of which we are made. England’s conglomerate history of Celts, Romans, Angles, Saxons, Vikings and Frenchmen represents the kinds of multiplicities that make up most nations over many centuries. Thus Norway too composed itself from diversities: the north and west coastal towns in particular have complex histories of sea-faring marauders from mostly the south and the east; the wandering Germanic tribes infiltrated the inland areas; the indigenous Sami maintained their very different languages, reindeer herding and sacred habits; Romani and Tartar, as gypsies, suffered 500 years of degradation.

In postmodernity the notion of a monoculture is also absurd. The very term multicultural (Hage, 1998) refuses singular meaning, singular theories, singular truths, definite grammatical articles (such as the meaning, the truth, the outcome). Replacing certainties with dubious plurality (as in multiple findings from a research project; many different ways of going about learning; many forms of excellence in pedagogy) marks today’s postmodern praxis. Relatedly, seeing pedagogical practices rather than practice, pedagogies rather than pedagogy, and theories rather than theory, denotes a break from modernity. Here then is a second reason for not taking seriously the monocultural.

From the above then, history and the theories of postmodernity function to normalise multiculturalism. Why then go seemingly backwards and write about the *mono*? I do so from a viewpoint of a foreigner. Confronted with the other, in the form of a culture and a language unfamiliar, the appearance of this other is its own solid unification. *Imagined* monoculturalism is what the foreigner faces: tight knit groups, unfriendly faces, strange food and celebrations, seemingly similar but different dialects, unshared laughter, unknown reasons for work practices and recreation practices assumed normal. For the members of a dominant culture, a monocultural quality is an impossibility, given what they know about local historical differences, shades of meaning in pronunciations, regional cooking, emotional expressions, and seasonal links to the earth. For the non-dominant, whoever, whose roots have sprung from elsewhere, all of these are minor. What is major is the lack of access, the exclusion, the isolation. Here I write (to right) the extreme: not all foreigners feel this way all of the time, and many refuse a foreign label. Yet the experience of being confronted by the monocultural is the life history of the marginalised. Whatever its reason it is the unspeakable irrationalism of difference.



The Australian example of what happens with ‘a nationalist monocultural agenda’ (Luke and Luke, 1999; 240) has been given much media publicity, especially in South East Asia. There, as in Australia, people have been angry and offended by Pauline Hanson’s ‘One Nation’ right wing political party working actively as racist. This is monoculturalism at its most overt. From my experience monoculturalism also operates covertly, as the unsaid. For teachers, institutional leaders and students within such a culture to realise this, much deconstructive work is required (Cannella, 1999; Davies, 1989; Viruru, 2001). Getting to see and hear what your own culture has made normal is thus the necessarily ethical work of academics, in-service educators and other activists likely to have an influence on changing practices. This work involves the recognition that a monocultural nationalism always disadvantages those not from the national majority. It acts on the knowledge that with normalised discourses a nation’s majority practices go unmarked and unremarked.

What follows is more theoretical. For this I draw from postcolonial and feminist poststructural theories, which each in their different ways evolved from combining the work of Foucault and Derrida (Ghandi, 1998; Rhedding-Jones, 1995). Gayatri Spivak (1999), who works with both the postcolonial and the feminist, dialoguing between Derrida and Foucault, continues to deconstruct and challenge the validity of Western culture and epistemology. In a small way, I attempt to follow her. It may seem that monoculturalism is the opposite of cultural pluralism (Nederveen, Pieterse & Parekh, 1995), yet poststructural theories and practices of undoing binaries always reject such polarised thought. I argue that in New Times we both take in and reconstruct a simultaneous monoculturalism and a cultural multiplicity.

The term ‘monocultural regimes’ is used by Nederveen, Pieterse and Parekh (1995; 14) to demonstrate effects and challenges from globalisation, empire and colonialism. For monocultural regimes, decolonialisation involves refocusing on minorities and indigenous peoples (Nederveen Pieterse & Parekh, 1995; 12). Instead of nations being centred on themselves, the decentering includes others (Rhedding-Jones, 2005a). Thus Eurocentrism becomes Afrocentrism and Indo-Asiocentricisms. Said otherwise, the previously unseen and unheard nationalisms, in the forms of language and accepted sets of socially interactive values and learnings, give way. In theory this echoes Foucault’s ‘regimes of truth’, where discourses institutionalise themselves as normalising powers. Opening borders and allowing border crossings, of languages, choices of what to do with time and values in educational institutions and with technologies, is thus a catalyst for change.

A further reason for naming the monocultural then, is the development of new theory. Within the theories of postmodernity are the erasures of boundaries between dichotomies: the home culture and the foreign culture for example, or the immigrant and the non-immigrant. This in effect constructs a new singularity which is a conglomerate singularity. Far from being a negative description of a culture, the mono effects here are new blendings, shifts and transformations. Theorising a contemporary cultural shift to a collective singularity rather than a unitary singularity allows for diversities within it. In this way grammatical collectives, such as a team, a committee or a group, require a singular noun but are understood as containing multiplicity. Perhaps a new monocultural society could similarly reflect and construct new inclusions of otherness, new transformations of the past and the dominant.

Returning to the point that there are only mono(culture)s, this then can be understood as always the view of outsiders. Hence, as Derrida writes, regarding languages, it is ‘the other’ who is ‘monolingual’ (Derrida, 1998). This then becomes, from Derrida, a rhapsody of the ‘prosthesis of origin’. Although I have heard him lecture in English, he writes:

I am a monolingual. My monolingualism dwells, and I call it my dwelling; it feels like one to me, and I remain in it and inhabit it. It inhabits me. The monolingualism in which I draw my very breath is, for me, my element. (p.1)



He speaks, it seems, of French. For him, given all his complexities of Frenchness, Algerian-ness and transnationalism, the mono *matters*. (Post)philosophically, it is at there at the same time as all of the *multis*. This is why identity, which is not only about origins but about choices, life events and languages, is extended or added to by these. The mono, from Derrida, is not an opposite denying the multi. Yet later I read (p. 34), ‘For never was I able to call French, this language I am speaking to you, my “mother tongue”.’ Must we know the facts of his linguistic origins? Does it matter which mono he means? Who is it who names a mono, and why? ‘When I said that the only language I speak is *not mine*, I did not say foreign to me. There is a difference.’ (p. 5; emphasis in original) The mono by this becomes the familiar, as may a language learned later. This sense of mono, an opposite from much of my essay, inserts other possibilities.

Taking this a little further, I turn to Deleuze (1993). The Deleuzian theory of folding is that folds go on to infinity as what once was becomes invisible and new singularities construct themselves from earlier subdivisions. Deleuze, following the Baroque philosopher Leibniz, calls this the monad. A monandrous plant, for example, has within its flower one stamen, yet the plant comprises many parts. The monad in music, for example, comprises a higher unity of vertical harmonics and horizontal melodies (Deleuze 1993; 127). If this is useful for theorising a culture then it must allow for change, flow and eventual dissolution. Risking oversimplification of a philosophical complexity, I isolate the following sentence from Deleuze (1993; 125): ‘The object itself overflows its frame in order to enter a cycle or a series.’ Regarding cultures and the individually encultured, I find this a useful analogy.

To work with Deleuze a little longer: ‘Every monad thus expresses the entire world, but obscurely and dimly because it is finite and the world is infinite.’ (1993; 86) This monad then, is what I am calling the monocultural, representing and reflecting other monocultures, which themselves function similarly. Hence focusing on cultures named (in my case Australia until 1997, and urban Oslo after that) serves to demonstrate the non-specificity of locations, the globalisation of postmodernity. In this way cultures blur and contract, enfold each other and expand, shift from micro to macro, produce clarity from obscurity and then plunge back into obscurity. All of this fits with the Deleuzian/Leibnizian theory of pleating of matter, of replacement of matter by form. Hence in the forming of new cultural enactments and representations, what matters is movement itself. Here the metaphor of folding focuses not on the two surfaces folded, but the point at which they interact, enclose and reverse their directions. Seen pragmatically, this point could be early childhoods in the multicultural situations of institutions.

## Institutions

For children, early childhood education splits into the institutions of early schooling and pre-schooling or day care. For adults in higher education, the institutions are of undergraduate and postgraduate coursework, professional practice in the field, and funded or unfunded research projects. I am currently working between all of these. In my work in Norway I sometimes visit pre-schools and day care centres. What follows are exemplary texts, for developing thinking from the theories and ideas above. I shall not stop to spell out the thinking.

*As a foreigner myself I often have other people with different ethnic backgrounds coming up to me to say, ‘How did you get your job teaching pre-school teachers? Did you have to do the exams in Norwegian like we did? How long can you stay in Norway?’ In giving the answers (‘I got the job after much trying. Yes I’ve got all the qualifications. And yes I had to pass the Norwegian exams before I applied.’) I quite often find out that the people I am talking to are also highly educated in their own countries: a man from Malaysia had an Australian PhD in*



*biochemistry and was working as a day care assistant. Others tell me they could not read or write before they moved to Norway and then had to learn to be literate. Occasionally I meet a teacher who has herself taken the long hard road to higher education in this new country and language. Sometimes there is anger or near tears at the difficulty of it all, the sadness of the memories of isolation during the coursework, the sheer hell of the student cafeteria for example. One woman from Pakistan told me she failed the Norwegian exam three times before she was able to begin as a first year early childhood education student, after her own children grew up.*

Some sample questions here, regarding practice, are: What can be done to make access simpler? What can make course progression more likely? How will more ethnic minority and other minority people want to start doing the course? Why are the institutions as they are? Do they function independently of the people who work and play within them? What are the links between all of this and publicity and economic rationalism? The following narrative comes from notes from a pre-school playground, where I was employed to supervise a student-teacher-carer. In considering this we should focus on institutions rather than on individuals as ways forward in practice and in theory.

*There are three little boys here who stay close to each other. All the other boys and girls are white. After lunch the children get quite a lot of help from the adults to put on their heavy outdoor suits and boots. The three little boys seem keen to go out. They rush straight to the gate, stand there wistfully looking down the road. All the others are busy with trucks in the gravel pit, riding the cars, making houses out of the big blocks. After a while the woman assistant who I think is from Somalia goes to the three little boys at the gate, stands there talking to them for a bit, then takes two of them by the hands down to the swings. The third little boy follows. They seem happy with the swings, and I suppose they soon forget about their mothers coming up the road to get them. Why was it the Black assistant who came to the rescue of the three little boys? Why wasn't it me, or the student or the supervising teacher? I became part of the dominating culture, not identifying with immigrants.*

A focus on institutions, as in the examples above from day-care centres, follows the theorisations of power set off by Foucault (1980; 1999) and his focus on local sites. From Foucault is the notion that individuals in organisations operate as elements of the articulation of power. It is not that we consent to do this; rather that we do so inadvertently, by our unspoken collaboration. In this way power effectively operates 'both inside and outside the world of its victims' (Ghandi, 1998; 14). Put into a context of monocultural constructs, it could then be said that the people who construct a monoculture are not only those of the dominant society and language, but those others who have been co-opted by it, as immigrants across the generations, and as I was in my role as the visiting Norwegian supervisor of praxis. Further, speaking only the language of the dominant, as happens in Norwegian pre-schools and as I am careful to do, is in a Foucault sense an effect of the power of the Norwegians in their own country. Those of us who are not Norwegian but live here, act in effect as agents of the dominant language, by speaking and acting as only that, and denying our transnationalisms.

Subverting the established order, of Norwegian pre-school pedagogies highly emphasising social collaboration for example, involves importing other pedagogies, from the home countries and nations of the relocated. Challenging and changing pedagogy, for the supposed learning of all of the children and all of the higher education students who will one day work as professionals, has hardly begun. Beyond pedagogy (curriculum?) but related to it are other practices. These are the qualities of everyday interactions, the customary few words



that people exchange in passing, the uses and non-uses of touch, eye contact and time, the accepted ways of being together and alone, the interactions between adults and children, the valuing of contact between children, between children and objects, between age groups.

In higher education institutions, the monocultural is guarded and transferred by the gate-keeping of examiners. Getting *in* to a course is the first step to accessing the peripheries of power. Once past the peripheries, students must try to write the assignments, demonstrate spoken language fluencies, write enough impressive words, regurgitate or do something about the accepted discourses. It is at all of these points that the differences between majorities and minorities come to the surface. Without knowing who has written the exam essays (higher education uses student numbers not student names) white middle-class middle-aged lecturers decide particular writings are unacceptable. Student anonymity is seen to provide a fair practice. History should have told us that *anon* was a woman struggling to voice her meanings in the literary world of men. Not learning this lesson, we continue to believe that the *anon* who fails the exam is not a Black, mature-age, single parent.

In Norwegian higher education, Norwegian values, parochialism and monolingualism have constructed pedagogical coursework for early childhood education according to their own particular and localised standards. The eight-hour exam, for example, where students handwrite all day with guarded trips to the toilet, was seen in 2000 as nothing out of the ordinary. Similarly unremarked were the assignment requirements: to produce shared computer print-outs, after weeks of work with others, and without identification of who has written what and whose words were not included. Getting ethnic minorities into higher education is a crucial step for statistically appropriate representations, and the acknowledgement of difference as a resource. Getting them/us in must then be matched by culturally relevant pedagogies and evaluation practices. These involve higher education academics' constructs of the monocultural. Rephrased: who does the teaching, the lecturing and the examining is crucial to the outcomes of multiculturalisms and anti-racist hopes. A brief look here at who has tenure, who has seniority and who has published the respected academic texts will demonstrate the lack of minority inputs to power. The creation of 'diasporic public spheres' (Appadurai, 1996; 10), in this location, has not yet begun.

## Practical matters

Which practices are the ones that currently construct a monocultural society? Which specific practices in early childhood education are operating to convert multiplicity and diversity into representations of the dominant culture? Are there differences here between what is offered to young children and what is offered to the professionals who will care for them and teach them? How can these things change?

*In Oslo, third and fourth year early childhood teacher-students asked practising professionals what constituted the multicultural, within the early childhood settings where they worked (Karaman, Lartey, Mbonika and Paila, 2000). Not surprisingly quite a few of the teacher-carers and administrators said that simply being in Oslo meant that their pre-school was multicultural, because here so many different races are represented. Others said that they sometimes had a Pakistani Week, where the children with Pakistani backgrounds could share something of their culture. In contrast, being critically conscious that Pakistani culture, amongst others, exists within Oslo on every day of the year, and not just as a special event curiosity, produces new challenges.*

For teacher-carers with children under the age of six, embracing the multilingual and the critical multicultural (May, 1999), and resisting the monocultural, poses problems previously unimagined (*Senter mot etnisk diskriminering*, 2000; Skoug, 1999; Tefre, Andreassen &



Otterstad, 1997). If you do not know what the children and your co-workers are saying, how do you maintain your authority, let alone your composure? Yet such situations are beginning to come about, with teachers believing in the power of communications without themselves always at the commanding centre, believing in learning without having to measure the outcomes, believing in play without the language of dominance being the only language heard. Letting learning and play and communications look after themselves thus represents a major shift in teacher-carer role.

## Postscripts

This essay was mostly written in 2000. It was presented as a conference paper in London, at the 10<sup>th</sup> European Early Childhood Education Research Association conference (EECERA). Since then I have not tried to publish the paper, having other professional targets to aim for, namely, practical change in the workplace around me, and the building of a local and critical research culture. Meanwhile some of ‘my’ postgraduate students and colleagues (eg. Andersen, 2006; Becher, 2004; Fajersson, 2006; Otterstad, 2006; Rossholt, 2006) have been working from this particular paper and its ideas. The problem of wanting local effects is that you sometimes ignore the international, in this case international publication. Now that there is a publication home for transnational curriculum inquiry, I realise that is where the rewritten paper should go. As a result of thinking more about curriculum (since Rhedding-Jones, 1984, when Stephen Kemmis was my supervisor; and since then as Rhedding-Jones, 2001; 2002a), I see that this paper has functioned for the last five years as curriculum for the Norwegians named above. Further, the years of distancing between the first writing of this essay and its final draft reflect my own self-understandings of shift between foreigner and transnational. Evidence of this is my international editing (Rhedding-Jones and Grieshaber, 2005; Rhedding-Jones, 2006).

*Transnational Curriculum Inquiry* has through its review process let me think a lot more about what I have been thinking and writing. As no writing is ever ended I therefore take up the editor’s suggestion that I answer my reviewers in another separate short piece. In the interests of textual coherence I would like to keep the essay above as it is: a historical construction of some theories relating to my professional positioning in 2000. For readers interested in how curriculum practices impact on all this I would point them to my chapter on diversity (Rhedding-Jones, 2005b). Also, I have for the last year been highly engaged in practical work once a week with Muslim children aged 1-6, and with Muslim women who work in pre-school day care/education. Whatever monoculturalism was, it is not here.

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