Article

Reconceptualizing theory/policy/curriculum/pedagogy in Early Child (Care and) Education: Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education (RECE) 1991-2012

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“RECE is less an organization than an evolving group of early childhood educators who come together each year to discuss cutting edge research, theory, and practice. We are not incorporated. There are no dues (other than the annual conference fee). There is no official publication (other than the web site). We have no board or officers (other than the folks who volunteer at each conference to host and organize the conference the following year)” (see RECE Wiki at http://recesite.wikispaces.com).
Part I. A cultural history of RECE

Theoretical framings for a “cultural history of RECE”. This paper draws from a sense of new historicism, or cultural history (Popkewitz, Franklin & Pereyra, 2001), and post-structural theories of language, truth, power, governmentality and technologies of the self from Michel Foucault (1980, 1991; Rabinow, 1984). I also draw from Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome that focuses on contingency, non-linearity, rhizomatic, unpredictable and uncertain movement, and a micropolitics of political action (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1997/2007; Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Rose, 1999). Therefore, my cultural history of RECE—a nonorganization—draws from post-structural framings of history, ruptures, non-linearity, as opposed to a more modernist history that suggests causality, progress, linearity from past to present, movement in a form of evolutionary historical notion of time and a linear history that presents history as an uncontested form of scientific ‘truth.’ In this paper, I want to suggest a sense of multiple representations, a rather than the history related to Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education or a conference called RECE.

As Foucault (1971/1984) suggests: “The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled… Necessarily, we must dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions. Knowledge, even under the banner of history, does not depend on ‘rediscovery’ and it emphatically excludes ‘the rediscovery of ourselves.’ History becomes ‘effective’ to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. ‘Effective’ history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it does not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting” (from Foucault, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History in Rabinow, 1984, p.88).

Thus, the “reconceptualization” of early childhood education, along with an associated conference titled RECE, as told by me, needs to be immediately stepped on, cut up (drawing on Foucault’s quote above), opened up to mis- and other representations; mine is one narrative among many. I do not want to present a linear, descriptive narrative (though some will see this in this way), but rather a sketch of it as a rhizome, an attempt to open new discussion, spaces for different ideas and actions. The paper focuses on some of the initial aims and discussions when the conference first started in 1991, and some of the ways in which original hopes and aims have and have not taken hold as I may have hoped in the early 1990s.

A collective autobiographical component of history—who early RECE founders were. The majority of those interested in RECE in its beginning years in the 1980s and early 1990s were academic
researchers with strong bases in Schools or Colleges of Education or in Human or Child Development programs, all with an emphasis on early childhood education and child care. For the most part, we were North American academics (male and female) who were from varied classed and gendered backgrounds, but largely Euro American in ethnicity. Many of us had interdisciplinary backgrounds such as child development, developmental psychology, anthropology and education, curriculum studies and quantitative and qualitative research. Most, including me, added onto initial knowledge bases in child development new interests and study of critical studies of the curriculum, anthropological studies of education, cross-cultural studies, knowledge of qualitative research methodologies, liberal and critical feminist theories, post-structural analyses and more radical gender/sexuality studies.

Because this is my representation of this story, I try to present my own views on these early hopes and achievements and end with a theoretical argument about why some of those aims have been achieved at least in part—and in some locations, while other aims have been represented by smaller movements and actions—especially, as I see it, at least in the USA—over the twenty year period since the RECE conference started in October, 1991 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

A history within a history of RECE. The first Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education conference was initiated in 1991 as a tentative start for new discussions, critique and presentation of then marginalized approaches to research, theory, policy, and pedagogy. Drawing from the work of other critical theorists in education and curriculum studies at the time, the attendees at the first few Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education conferences had different theoretical roots, diverse disciplinary affiliations and backgrounds in research, a desire to stimulate new discussions, new research approaches and search for more equitable policies and pedagogical practices in early care and education at a material level with families, teachers and children and at an academic level in teacher education and graduate education and research. While the name of the conference was and is important to my story, of greater importance were debates about the dominance of psychology and child development “truths” about children and childhood, as well as positivist research in determining what knowledge was valid and reliable about children, teaching and the definition of quality programs for children. The dominance of psychology, child development and “Science” that was based on logical-empiricist or empirical-analytical principles had emerged in the USA particularly in the beginning of the 20th century (Bloch, 1991, 1992; Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997). In various publications from the mid-1980s onward, there had been questions about the dominance of psychology and child development as well as ‘empirical-analytic’ or positivist research in early childhood education and the ways in which these discourses of developmental psychology and positivist research paradigms governed early childhood education and child care and teacher education, as well as research on and with teachers, parents, and children (Bloch, 1987; David, 1980; Polakow, 1982; Silin, 1987; Walkerdine, 1984). In addition, early education-oriented researchers were beginning to draw from
critical curriculum theorists and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory to question taken-for-granted approaches to curriculum development in education; Jonathan Silin (1987) asked whose knowledge should count in the curriculum? What knowledge is most valued for young children? Bernard Spodek (1980) also asked whether developmental psychology was the only framework which should guide the early childhood curriculum; what content matters in the curriculum, and who should decide? Others suggested that common, taken-for-granted precepts in early childhood education such as Piagetian theory or a child-centred curriculum may reproduce inequalities rather than provide a liberal space for learning (Walkerdine, 1984; O’Loughlin, 1992). King (1982) described how play and work reproduced class inequalities within the kindergarten curriculum, while Gracey (1975) called kindergarten academic boot-camp by illustrating how the curriculum focused on regimented behavior such as, learning to line up and be quiet and know who (the teacher) was in charge. David (1980) drew on critical feminist, and neo-Marxist theory to examine the relation between the State, parenting and education. Rather than focusing on ‘maternal involvement’ in school as a neutral good, she suggested that maternal rather than paternal involvement was expected as part of women’s assignment to childrearing as their primary productive labor for the state.

Polakow’s (1982) initial critique of our concepts of childhood and child development were also focused on gender and class inequalities and were published in The erosion of childhood. Lubeck (1985) in Sandbox Society, showed through ethnographies of children in low-income Head Start and middle-class preschools how class (and to some extent race) relates to curriculum and pedagogical practices for young children in the USA. Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989) in Preschool in Three Cultures illustrated how qualitative research and ethnography cross-nationally could be used to see things in ways other than the traditional positivist research had shown to date. By 1989, Ayers’ The Good Preschool Teacher (1989) and Davies’ (1989) Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales had been published and continued to illuminate the importance of critical, post-structural, feminist perspectives and how qualitative research could show how teachers’ and children’s experiences varied by class and gender and how the experiences of teachers and children could be/should be represented in research.

Thus, while an incomplete listing of work, the late 1970s and the 1980s were fertile grounds for new types of research on early childhood and childhood to be done. At the same time, many of us were meeting outside of early childhood ‘normal’ conference settings and were recognizing the varied work of others who were critiquing dominant approaches to the study of childhood. The need for a new conference was recognized.

The Reconceptualists—Critical curriculum theory. The foundations for the RECE conference were varied.

An early purpose to the RECE conference was simply to have a space to present academic research drawing on disciplines and theoretical and methodological frameworks that were marginalized within the broader field of academic early childhood education conferences and
publications. From this amorphous intellectual desire, ‘we’ formed other desires and made room for the pleasure of meeting in small conferences together to talk, think and to reinforce critical pedagogical and policy action. We wanted a ‘safe’ space to engage in critiques of dominant paradigms, methodologies, policies and pedagogical practices and to explore new theories and their meaning or implications for our research. We also wanted to support younger colleagues by forming a network in which we could learn from each other and support each other in our individual work. We used the RECE forum as a way to open up spaces to new ideas with a social justice and equity framework that drew from the diverse critical theories we were using.

The term Reconceptualizing the Curriculum, however, came from key curriculum theorists who had used that specific term initially to critique traditional studies of curriculum (e.g., see Pinar, 1975a and Pinar, 1975b) with chapters or references to work by Huebner, Schubert, Pinar, Apple, Grumet, Miller and Greene among others where he (and they) drew on this phrase or title initially.) According to Kessler (1991) and Kessler and Swadener, 1992b, Bill Pinar’s (1975) call for the reconceptualization of curriculum studies in education and his critique of the Tyler Rationale (e.g., see Kliebard, 1975,) with its focus on objectives, lesson plans and prescribed evaluation of outcomes and testing, formed a foundation for their critique of early childhood theory and curriculum. In addition, Kessler and Swadener (1992a) focused on other critical curriculum theory questions (again various authors arguments and debates in Pinar, 1975): What knowledge counts? Whose knowledge is represented in the curriculum, and whose is excluded? How do we decide what is valuable to teach? How does the reproduction of an exclusionary or privileged and incomplete knowledge relate to power and the reproduction or production of inequalities?

Early Debates before RECE. By 1990, a small group of people who had attended either the Anthropology and Education annual conferences at the American Anthropological Association meetings (Bloch, Lubeck, Swadener, Walsh) and/or the Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory (Kessler, Jipson, Ayers, Bloch) used these conferences as models for, and drew the name “reconceptualizing” for, the first RECE conference, and to call for “reconceptualization” of early childhood curriculum and studies more broadly. Amos Hatch, in a separate conference, focused on Qualitative Research in Early Education in 1990. These different strands came together in the 1991 RECE conference.

While the theoretical foundations of those attending the RECE conference were multiple and complex in origin, the word ‘reconceptualizing,’ early childhood education (RECE) designated the very specific history within critical curriculum studies in the USA at the time. The push to examine power relations, structures that reproduced or produced inequities within schooling, early education and child care settings and within broader social institutions affiliated with education and care came from this foundational background. The idea of *rethinking* early childhood education (used in some writing and in one conference I attended) does not, therefore, have the same meaning as ‘Reconceptualizing’ The word ‘Reconceptualist’ was also used in a
particular way and was not used by most early education researchers in the 1970s and 1980s before Kessler and Swadener and (Kessler, 1991, Introduction in Kessler & Swadener, 1992a) used it in their publications.

**Trying to Rupture Theory and Research Discourses in Early Care and Education—RECE as an “event”- the Early years: 1991-1996.** Primary themes in the first years of RECE were critiques of the universal claims about childhood made by the dominant discourses of developmental psychology and the pedagogical framework that informed notions of ‘quality education’ in the Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) that dominated concepts of ‘best quality’ for early education/care programs in the USA (and subsequently elsewhere, for example, see Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1997). Critiques also focused on the privileging of positivist research/theory/methodologies as ‘best evidence’ and the use of and importance of different types of qualitative research methodologies, as well as critical, post-structural and feminist theories and methodologies in research (Ayers, 1989; Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997; Davies, 1989; Graue, 1993; Hatch, 1995; Kessler & Swadener, 1992a; Leavitt & Powers, 1994; Lubeck, 1994; Mallory & New, 1994; Silin, 1995). While much of the discussion and many of the publications within the USA at that moment were directed at a critique of dominant discourses of child development and developmental psychology, and the empirical-analytic, positivist research paradigm that dominated ‘knowledge’ and notions of good research, a variety of other work in the early conferences focused on exclusions and reproductions of class/gender/racial/age/ability inequities based on the centuries-long assimilationist/colonizing forms of education that prevailed. We focused on the need for more attention to multilingual/multicultural and a social reconstructionist/social justice oriented early childhood education and the politics of early childhood education; some good examples include: *Deconstructing early childhood education: Social Justice and Revolution* (Cannella, 1997), *Language, Culture, and Power* (Soto, 1996), *The Politics of Early Education* (Soto, 2000), *Lives on the Edge: Single Mothers and their Children in the Other America* (Polakow, 1993), *Children and families “at promise”*: *Deconstructing the discourse of “at risk”* (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995) and *Sex, Death, and the Education of Children: Our Passion for Ignorance in the age of AIDS* (Silin, 1995). Different attendees at the early RECE conferences also began to focus on cross-national policy analysis (Cannella & Kincheloe, 2002; Swadener & Bloch, 1996), different ways to understand inclusions and exclusions in pedagogies around sexuality and cultural identities (Greishaber & Cannella, 2001; Silin, 1995; Tobin, 1997) and a deconstruction of the concept and evaluation of ‘quality’ as measured by governing discourses of developmental psychology and neoliberalism (Dahlberg, Pence & Moss, 1997/1997).

**Disruption of Dominant Discourses in Theory/Research/Pedagogies/Policy.** Since the mid-1990s, new themes and different approaches to research have emerged rhizomatically (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) within/around/before and after different conferences related to groups and ideas from those who had been and from those that were not part of earlier discussions. Continuing critiques
by sociologists of childhood from the new sociology of childhood researchers in Great Britain (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Jenks, 1982; Jenkins, 1998) as well as continuing work by Valerie Walkerdine and others in the field of critical psychology continued to push at the borders of foundational arguments about the truth and knowledge base in early education and child development. Despite this, as discussed later, growing neoliberal counter-discourses calling for ‘rigor’ and evidence-based (e.g., largely positivist/empirical) in the social sciences and in education held many critiques at bay such that, at least in the USA, most critiques were still marginal in mainstream policy, pedagogy, research and teacher education. This, however, was not only true in early education/child care fields, but also within educational research more broadly. Critical scholarship was increasingly recognized, but still far from dominant.

Calls for more critique with political action, inclusion of more diverse groups (more teachers especially, more diverse representation of different cultural groups and less attention to “minority world” research and researchers—see Pence & Hix-Small, 2009) and themes that more actively use decolonizing/anti-colonial perspectives in research were made. In the late 1990s, many more of the RECE researchers moved toward a call for more marginalized voices to be heard in curriculum, including a focus on children’s voices and experiences (e.g., Silin, 1995; Soto & Swadener, 2005; Tobin, 1997, 2000) and more post-structural and postcolonial and decolonizing theoretical framings of research in the conferences held at the University of Hawaii-Manoa (1997), the Queensland University of Technology (2000), Bank Street College, NYU and Teacher’s College, Columbia (2001), at Arizona State University (2003) and at the University of Waikato (2006). These conferences and individual presenters were leading to new approaches to research, greater experimentation with post-structural and postcolonial/decolonizing research than had been represented in the early years of the conferences or in themes (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Mutua & Swadener, 2004.)

In 2004, in Oslo Norway, the theme focused on language and power (a post-structural frame, as well as a social inclusionary orientation with an emphasis on multi-lingual education policies). In more recent years, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence’s (1997/ 2007) work, drawing on both Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical work with the rhizome, have been used to discuss a continued critique of the neoliberal naturalness of discourses of “quality”, the circulation of discourses of efficiencies, privatization, standards and outcomes-based assessments and a new macro- and micro-political analyses of programs and pedagogies in early childhood care and education. These ideas, represented in diverse research, publications and experimentation with new pedagogies in teacher education (e.g., MacNaughton, 2003, 2005) have led to even greater attention toward critical action research on classroom pedagogies, opening up new spaces for children’s and teacher’s thinking in conferences and in some teacher preparation programs (e.g., Ryan & Greishaber, 2005).

As suggested earlier, from a somewhat different critical theoretical trajectory, Soto and Swadener (2005) and Mutua and Swadener (2005) and the critically
significant work of the Maori/Non-Maori researchers participating in the development of and continued critique of the Te Whariki early childhood curriculum (originally published in 1997) (Ritchie & Rau, 2007, 2009) led to a more diverse understanding in how interdisciplinary critiques, policy, and pedagogical change (rupture vi) might take place. Conferences in Rotorua, New Zealand in 2006, in Palestine in 2009, and the 21st conference in Kenya in 2013 have themes focused on indigenous communities and the decolonization of research. They focus directly on the politics involved in decolonizing/doing anti-colonial research and the possibilities of imagining otherwise—as decolonizing pedagogical practice in early education and child care. On a somewhat different but related thematic, continual examinations of childhood voice, subjectivity and imagining children otherwise (e.g., O’Loughlin & Johnson, 2010) also facilitated the intertwining of Lacanian and other psychoanalytic theorizing to be used in resistance of what some perceived as overly constraining structural and post-structural theories that reduced the subjective self to discursive or structural constraints and analyses. Postcolonial, feminists and posthumanist, ecologically-driven theory focusing on the child as part of a global, transspecies environment (most recently, see Taylor, 2013, here) has moved toward new theoretical lens, and different ways to imagine action, pedagogies of hope, and change.

Part II. RECE turns nearly twenty and some of us are getting old(er)
Goals and Values Embedded in the RECE conference from the early conferences. While goals and values must be represented as shared visions, even consensually agreed upon, the RECE non-organization, as noted in the first quote in this paper, is notably not an “organization” in typical terms. Multiple times, the idea of incorporating the conference as an organization has come up at business meetings but was approved only in 2012. with a new website the same year (http://receinternational.org and listserve rece@lists.wisc.edu, and Facebook page for interested affiliates or conference goers (Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education group). Each conference has registration fees that cover as many meals as possible for a two or three day conference, with reduced registration for graduate students. Every conference has a new theme decided by the members attending the business meeting at the previous year’s conference. Conference hosts and program chairs are also decided at those business meetings.

As suggested from the initial years, there were multiple threads—purposes, goals, values—these rhizomatic “lines of flight” have only increased over the years. However, those of us who were at the initial conferences had political and pedagogical goals we hoped to achieve through the conference. In formulating this keynote presentation for the tenth CEIEC conference the theme - “Working together to build communities for equity” - illustrated for me our “parallel” play with similar ideas, and allowed me to think that the development of more strategic alliances and networks where RECE and the then CEIEC held similar ideas and some shared visions. vii Many of us have been part of the same networks and alliances with our critical educator groups of colleagues in New Zealand, the University of Melbourne faculty and staff in ECE, and other key alliances with
faculty in other places in Australia; we have joint colleagues in various parts of Europe, East and South Asia, Latin America, and in Africa who are exploring the same and somewhat different issues (see, for example, Brougère & Vandenbroeck, 2007, a Francophone group that also focuses on reconceptualizing early education). While there are many other networks and organizations I could name, my point is to illustrate that there are different networks that are aligned with strategic similarities and differences; we are part of the “network society” (Castels, 2009/2011), shared and yet different “discourse communities”, part of the globalization of knowledge within what some call the “knowledge society” and others call the “information society”. In addition, we are all working/living within specific and yet globalized, disciplinary societies, as well as what Gilles Deleuze termed “societies of control” (Deleuze, 1995).

The goals of RECE are not dissimilar to those discussed elsewhere; we know this because of the collective work done in New Zealand to decolonize research, knowledge and pedagogies for young children, their families and their nation. We know this because in Australia, your new Early Years Education Framework (http://deewr.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework, retrieved July 25, 2013) has been open to discussions of diverse theoretical frameworks, questions of equity, justice, ethics and values. We know this because the OECD (1996) Strong Foundations document refers to and includes some reference to an ethics and politics of early childhood (taken one presumes from the participation of those who read and liked Dahlberg and Moss, 2005) and the need to draw from multiple theories, including post-modern for our work.

We also know that there is a spread of discourses that reinforce or hold in place certain notions of best practice as normal, natural and best. We all know that we are allied in that our pedagogies and opportunities for young children and their families are still extremely unequal; indeed in the USA, the distribution of inequality of income is worse than it was 20 years ago. We know that our discourses related to quality programs, the truth of how children learn, and whose knowledge and which voices and discursive truths count, are still privileging a narrow “minority world” vision of most important knowledge (Pence & Hix-Small, 2009). We also know that in our new societies of control, we must find points of departure, openings, ways to renarrativize or reterritorialize, or to continue resistance and opposition to dominant exclusionary knowledge and power.

Reform that aims to rupture thinking and action. Therefore, in revisiting some of the early goals, values and purposes of RECE, I can ask what thinking or actions did we ‘cut open’, rupture or change? Which of these initial purposes, goals and values seem to have been “achieved” even partially, while others appear still locked into place by new forms of dominant discourses, and/or to be rhizomatically shifting in unpredictable ways? In the 1990s we hoped to “dismantle,” or find alternatives to:

- Discourses of child development or developmental psychology or educational psychology,
- discourses of the child as innocent, developing (primitive innocent unknowing) child to developed (mature sophisticated
Our non-group, our network-in-flux, had desired to interrogate the dominance of, as Foucault (1980) would suggest the regime of truth about child development, developmental psychology and discourses of childhood innocence, the young child in need of help and intervention by adults. In many ways, many different researchers from the late 1970s onward until today have indeed done such an interrogation of these regimes of truth. A list of volumes, known by many, have focused on these points; as illustrative examples, these include; Polakow’s (1982) The erosion of childhood, Tobin et al. (1989) Preschool in Three Cultures, Burman’s (1994) Deconstructing Developmental Psychology, Davies’ (1989) Frogs, snails, and feminist tales, Kessler and Swadener’s (1992a) Reconceptualizing the early childhood curriculum: Beginning the dialogue, Cannella’s (1997) Deconstructing Early Childhood Education, Cannella and Viruru’s (2004) Postcolonialism and Early Childhood Education, Leavitt and Power’s (1994) Emotions in Infant and Toddler Daycare, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence’s (1997/2007) Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Languages of Evaluation (2nd Ed.) and MacNaughton’s (2005) Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies.

Yet, recently, in a talk I gave at the 18th RECE conference in Georgia (October 2010), I stated “in the USA, the majority of state standards for early learning remain tied to child development ages/stages and research as a dominant guide for teachers and teacher educators, as well as for state and federal policies about which information represents ‘best knowledge’ about children” (Bloch, 2010.) In addition, best practices in pedagogy are still tied to “Developmentally Appropriate Practice” guidelines, in much the same way they were (or more so) in 1991 and 1992 when the RECE conferences (held respectively in Madison, Wi and in Chicago, Ill.) first critiqued these.

In the 1990s, we hoped to break open: Discourses of disciplinary expertise within the psychological sciences—especially child development, developmental psychology, and educational psychology—with a call to open up spaces to interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary studies of childhood (e.g. the fields of sociology of childhood studies, anthropological studies of childhood and education, historical studies of early education and child care). Discourses related to rigorous “evidence”-based, experimental design, and positivist/logical-empiricist assumptions about what research is best, and produces legitimate truth. In contrast, we wanted to open up new spaces for examining early education/child care as a critical theoretical space—drawing on the emerging work in critical structural and post-structural theories, including feminist theorizing (e.g., King, 1982; David, 1980; Polakow, 1982; Rose, 1989/1999; Walkerdine, 1984) as well as the new sociology of childhood researchers (e.g., Jenks, 1982; James et al., 1998). In addition, many of the initial members of RECE wanted to focus
The RECE network focused a great deal of attention, within the USA, on opening up new ways of doing research, different ways of thinking about “best evidence” or what some now call the “gold standard” of educational research (randomized and/or quasi-experimental design, rigorous, cause-and-effect studies, taking off from the natural science model of research, positivist, statistical, objective, replicable and generalizable searches for truth). Indeed there was enormous debate initially about who should be able to attend the conferences: did we want anyone who was interested in Early Childhood Education to present at the conference, even “scientific”, positivist researchers, in order to hear the new ideas of “others”? Or did we want a community of people (researchers, teachers, parents, policy-workers) who all used different forms of critical theories in their work, who would be able to push each other in their new ideas and new critiques?

In some ways, we, as a non-group, selected the latter----wishing to have a space for presentation and discussion of new types of research, new critiques, new theoretical framings. The space of RECE has been shifting and small—relatively speaking, albeit international. Our “discourse communities” (Kittler & Meteer, 1992) have been special to those of us who attend (Tobin, 2007), but also isolated from many—with some intentionality in so doing. This intentional decision to keep the conference small may have limited its ability to be heard by others. Having it be larger, however, may have led toward the politics of co-optation, as some argued, and made it less intellectually fruitful.

Despite the isolation, the diverse perspectives and international backgrounds of those attending RECE have pushed individuals toward new methodologies and ideas, new theories, different ways to read and use theoretical frameworks in our work, and certainly opened us up toward different ideas about policy, pedagogical practices and research methodology. The RECE network, over the years has published work—for some of us still new—on decolonizing research, polyvocality in research, studying children’s or parent’s voices, using critical ethnographic, narrative, life history, critical and post-structural action research, strands of feminist theory laced with different methodologies (collaborative/teacher, parent, children as researched and researching), various forms of critical discourse analyses (e.g., MacLure, 2003), and, as suggested, diverse qualitative theory/methodologies (Rhedding-Jones, 2005). We have pushed each other, answering the initial calls for “difference” in regimes of truth, different traditions of research, allowing different knowledge formation, policy ideas and political action to take place (Bloch, Swadener & Cannella, in press; Steinberg & Cannella, 2012).

In the 1990s, we also hoped to:
- Develop a social network of researchers and teacher educators
and graduate students as a very important early goal (drawing on Bloch, 1992); a longer term goal was to increase the number of faculty hires with a reconceptualizing ECE or critical/poststructural and feminist theoretical background and ECE background and interest in research at universities across the nation (first described explicitly in Bloch, 1992). This was important in terms of not wanting to continue to reproduce dominant discourses in teacher training and research. We wanted to be open to new paradigms of research, multidisciplinary research beyond the psychological sciences and child development, and, especially, to allow for critical theoretical research that would enable different ways of thinking and acting related to “dominant” or “normative” pedagogy and policy in ECE/Child care. (my memories)

Over the 20 years, we have certainly created new spaces for publications, conferences and networks of support. Many young graduate students have been hired at major universities in the USA and elsewhere—despite the fact that their research is “abnormal”, may not be well-funded or “grant-gettable”. It has still been difficult for many new lecturers and assistant professors without tenure to publish in peer reviewed journals, at least in the USA. Our new journal--International Journal on Critical Policy Studies of Childhood—while new and on-line is still one of the few journals in the United States that focuses on Reconceptualist types of research, or openly welcomes critical qualitative, narrative, or post-structurally oriented research studies. Previously many, in the USA, have looked to British and Australian peer reviewed journals to support a quest for tenure and promotion which still depends upon publication in “high status” peer reviewed journals. While several book series, especially Peter Lang’s Rethinking Childhood series first edited by Janice Jipson and Joe Kincheloe (now edited by Gaile Cannella and Shirley Steinberg), Contesting Childhoods edited by Dahlberg and Moss and Critical Cultural Constructions of Childhood by Bloch, Swadener and Cannella (now Bloch and Swadener) have successfully published many volumes, “high status” journal article publication has still been difficult for many junior scholars.

Finally, over these past 20 years, we had drawn from the “Reconceptualist” literature and wanted to interrogate whose voices were privileged or excluded, which values, knowledge and truths guided curriculum choices in ECE; what and whose theories and knowledge were included/excluded? As one example, the Developmentally Appropriate Practice guidelines (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), what and which theories framed constructions of childhood as well as “best” policies and pedagogical practices for children, teachers, and families. Here, in light of tightening discourses of standardization and testing of young children, increasing push-down of academics into the preschool years, and relentless assessment of “quality” of programs that, if lucky, rely on NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Standards criteria, the RECE discussions have had limited impact, except to maintain and have acceptance of legitimate critiques.

The response to our initial aims and purposes, the values we espoused in our
search for what and whose values count in the curriculum has been important and yet small at the same time. At a time, since at least the 1980s when neoliberal policies in education have resulted in more emphasis on testing, standardized curricula, and even universal standardized childhoods, the research, writing, and openings of new ideas in teacher education that have occurred have been encouraging. In New Zealand, the *Te Whariki* curriculum and new assessment tools provide an example for many of us that shifts and ruptures can occur. In Australia’s new Early Years framework (Australian Government, 2013), there are subtle shifts in wording that provide a lens into the important work Australian early childhood educators have been able to do in these past years—through being at the “table” for policy development, they have, with difficulty and perseverance, begun to make important changes in the framework policy documents (e.g., Sumsion, Barnes, Cheeseman, Harrison, Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2009; Phelan & Sumsion, 2008). These shifts in wording include a call for “multiple theories” (Australian Government, 2013). We see a statement of values about what we should care for, which ethical commitments are important. In Canada (Early Learning Advisory Group, 2008), Sweden and in the OECD documents (e.g., Starting Strong, Early Childhood Education and Care, published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development or OECD, 2001, http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/earlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm, retrieved 7/25/2013), we see the barest mention in the Curriculum frameworks of postmodern theory as one of the guiding theories for the written documents. These are important changes—in language, in the policy discourses that have begun to rupture, shift, and open up new possibilities for thinking and action.

As suggested above, in the USA, I don’t see this happening in the same way. Not only I, but many others are discouraged. Yet we are now leaders in many major universities. In writing this article, I have asked: how have we made an impact, or why have others made shifts in thinking whereas in the USA we have not? Responses to me have been slow in coming—as many of us, particularly as we see similar policies being continued in the Obama administration—are quite discouraged.

Yet others have said, look to teacher training—there’s more occurring in our teacher training than is apparent in state-by-state standards (Bloch & Kim, 2012; MacNaughton, 2003; Ryan & Greishaber, 2004). We are opening up spaces for new discussions—many are reading at the graduate level, at least, about different research methodologies, new ideas about theory and action. Yet, to many it seems we are also “stuck” in place. The next section examines this perception further.

**Part III. New rhizomatic openings, contingent alliances, complexities and action**

In Part III of this paper, I would like to examine further whether or not we are “stuck,” or whether, drawing on Foucault’s ideas of governmentality, Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome, Dahlberg and Moss’s idea of micropolitical action, and new calls for renarrativization (Ritchie & Rau, 2009 and further decolonization of research, ideas, and “western knowledge” as a regime of truth—we are moving as a serpent in unpredictable ways. Also, it has been important to examine diverse
networks and alliances, culturally and historically contingent “discourse communities” in understanding the ways in which we might feel “stuck in place,” but are also opening to new ways of thinking, and could develop differently imagined networks or communities to give greater power/status and legitimacy to ideas, and to further a politics of care and ethics of action.

While new openings have been achieved, within the governing discourses of the 21st century focusing on “evidence,” “standards,” and “quality” measurements, at least in the USA, the same emphases on developmental appropriateness, narrow notions of quality, best scientific evidence as ‘truth’, on a continued focus on individual differences and deficiencies in children, families, and their caregivers/teachers “in need of intervention and remediation”, continue as dominant, or governing discourses. However, using the notions of discursive regimes (Foucault, 1980), discourse communities (Kittler & Meteer, 1992), Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of the rhizome, I’d like to suggest that change should be viewed as non-linear, as a rupture in ideas, as a way to shift ideas and practices in unpredictable, rhizomatic ways. Discourses circulate in unpredictable ways, in and out of global/local spaces and places; they don’t move fast or with certain direction. Resistance, deterritorialization and reterritorialization occur constantly.

Drawing on Foucault’s notions of “regimes of truth,” (Foucault, 1980) and the ‘cutting’ of history (Foucault, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History in Rabinow, 1984, p.88), quoted page 2 in this article), and of truths, we can see RECE and allied movements as a proliferation of counternarratives, as ways of deterritorializing and renarrativing what and how to think and act. Critical, feminist/post-structural and postcolonial/anti-colonial theories, research, and pedagogical work require us and others to continue to interrogate, act and not to be co-opted into what is, but to ask: what could be? The article examines ways in which many of the same discourses that policed and regulated thinking and action in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s appear to remain in place—colonizing and constraining “reason and conduct” concerning young children/families/caregivers and teachers, teacher education and research. But, at the same time, there are different discourses now, different grids of reasoning that make things seem similar, while also being different, as there are new governmentalities, and also new lines of flight, rhizomatic movements, and openings made by critical scholars/educators today that are emerging, becoming. How can “critical educators” use strategic, transnational, yet contingent/localized alliances to enhance how critiques are heard and used? As the global and local policing and regulation of teachers, childhood(s), and families move in rhizomatic ways in the 21st century, within new societies of control, new power/knowledge configurations, what practices are being used to keep opening new spaces for thought, action, and an ethics of care about and for the other? As Malewski suggests;
field, and also how it is imagined and reimagined in unforeseen ways to produce a different state, a post-reconceptualist state (Malewski, 2010, p.5).

What, then, is meant by post-reconceptualization in Malewski and others recent work? In some sense, the term is misleading. While it certainly envelops the postdiscourses and the notion of post-qualitative research (see Lather, 2010), the argument to move beyond “reconceptualizing” to recognize the complexity, uncertainty, contingency, and unpredictability of today, requires us to continue to interrogate transparency of language, self-presence, and tendencies toward dominance (as well as our own attempts at reform or libratory intentions). It has also been used to refer to a generational shift among scholars working in the field... the move to see a lack of definition and proliferation not as balkanization but as a healthy state (Lather, 2010) and the pursuit of translations across difference.

By drawing on Malewski (2010) in his use of the term “post-reconceptualization,” I want to emphasize the need to NOT get caught up in a word, a theory, or a particular struggle, but the continuing need for debate, acceptance of contention, the complexity of the fight. Displacing a paradigmatic take that the “post” indicates a break, the “post” in post-reconceptualization signifies a scholarship that is trying to come to terms with reconceptualization through counterdiscourses that challenge concepts and objects that have come to matter so much to the field and the field of practice, and coadunate-discourses that so intermingled “provoke existing terminology into doing new work” (Malewski, 2010, p. 5; also see Lather, 2010; Miller, 2010.)

A closing. This paper illustrates a case of contingent movement rather than a more universalized orientation toward change (Butler, Laclau & Zizek, 2000). What I have tried to do is what Foucault suggests as troubling thought, conduct, and action. If so, perhaps it is what can be done now, at a given moment, or during a short period of twenty years; perhaps yes, perhaps no. I leave this question in the air... for further dialogue. Perhaps new lines of flight as well as further moves toward contingent strategic alliances will emerge. I rather think they must, and are in process, or moving in unpredictable ways now — in places where control, possibilities/impossibilities exist, allowing for dialogue and strategic and contingent action.

References


O'Loughlin, M. (1992). Rethinking science education: Beyond Piagetian constructivism toward a sociocultural


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This was originally given as an invited keynote presentation for the Tenth Honoring the Child, Honoring Equity Conference held at the University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia in November, 2010. I want to thank Dr Kylie Smith for hosting me, along with Dr Jane Page, and Professor Glenda MacNaughton who invited me to make the presentation. In addition, thank you to Professor Julie McLeod who sponsored several other talks and meetings during my visit. Misrepresentations or exclusions in this paper were unintentional, and solely my fault. My attempt was to represent what was and is occurring largely in the United States of America, but with references to others and other contexts where necessary and pertinent.

My story is only mine to tell. However, others would have a somewhat different story about the origins and objectives of the RECE conference in its earliest years (for some examples see Greishaber & Cannella, 2001; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Tobin, 2007; Cannella, Swadener & Che, 2007; Yelland, 2005).

A conference sponsored by Amos Hatch (1989) focused on qualitative research in ECE in the USA (see Hatch, 1995).

The use of ‘we’ is a metaphor for my own portrayal of what I remember, and what I have never known, or forgotten. Given that there is no one correct representation, my memories and my forgettings and exclusions are part of my understandings of shared memories and a collective historical narrative. Of the initial people at the 1991 RECE conference, Beth Swadener, Shirley Kessler, Sally Lubeck, Joe Tobin, Jan Jipson, Daniel Walsh, Bernard Spodek, Gary Price, Chelsea Bailey, Beth Graue and I had been instrumental in formulating the idea of the conference. It was hosted at University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1991 because much of the early work had initiated with the faculty and alumni of the critical theory-oriented Department of Curriculum and Instruction. A list of those who attended the first conference is available upon request.

An almost annual conference held at the Bergamo Conference Center in Ohio.

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vi Rupture is used in a very significant way in Foucaultian histories of the present, or genealogical work; it signals a significant break in discourse---one that isn’t evident “in the present” of this 20 year examination; so I use the word “lightly” here.

viii *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* has been of great use here.