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Theorizing an Early Childhood Educator's Authority for the Advancement of Social Goods

Authority is an uncomfortable subject for early childhood educators. This article outlines some tensions between the theory and practice of an early childhood educator's authority and the implications of these tensions for educators themselves and the social changes they envisage. Drawing on a range of feminist educational philosophers and critical pedagogy theorists, critiques of both traditional authority and a rejection of authority are examined. A description is offered of an early childhood educator's authority that emerges from the actualities of pedagogical experiences and relationships and that can influence and instigate action for social goods.

L'autorité constitue, pour les éducateurs de la petite enfance, un sujet plutôt désagréable. Cet article évoque quelques tensions entre la théorie et la pratique relativement à l'autorité d'un éducateur de la petite enfance. On traite également des répercussions de ces tensions sur les éducateurs et des changements sociaux que ceux-ci prévoient. Puisant dans le travail d'une gamme de philosophes féministes de l'éducation et de théoriciens du criticisme, nous examinons des critiques portant sur l'autorité traditionnelle aussi bien que sur le rejet de l'autorité. Nous offrons une description de l'autorité d'un éducateur de la petite enfance découlant de la réalité des expériences vécues et des rapports pédagogiques, et pouvant influencer et favoriser des actions qui visent le bien commun.

Working the Quandary of an Early Childhood Educator's Authority

It is often stated that an early childhood educator should not "be an expert." In theory, it seems reasonable to say that early childhood educators should not use expertise to assume authority and power over children and families. Rather, authority should be shared with children and families who are often disempowered through educational processes. Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2007) articulated this position in their description of pedagogical work:

> Such practice would not rely on "one best way" and the authority of the early childhood worker but would seek instead to bring multiple perspectives-of children, parents and others in the community-to the task of understanding or making meaning of pedagogical work with young children and engaging in on-going dialogue about what we want for our children. (p. 178)

Similarly, Novinger, O'Brien, and Sweigman (2005) have argued for a "deep and lasting critique of the culture of expertise" and the notion of the "expert" in teacher education programs and have proposed instead "a move toward a participatory, inclusive model wherein power is shared and knowledge is co-constructed and continually reassessed" (p. 219).

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On the other hand, it is also reasonable to say that early childhood educators are both powerful and powerless. North American society accords early childhood educators little expertise, authority, and status. Finklestein (1988) has described how early childhood educators throughout their history have lacked any authority because they do not produce and possess their own knowledge, but simply translate other people's theories into practice. Finklestein remarked,

> On the one hand, a small number of high-status, well-paid experts—paediatricians, child psychiatrists and psychologists, university professors in education departments and in faculties of human development—legitimately claim a sophisticated body of theoretical knowledge about child development. On the other hand, the practitioners of early childhood education-nursery school and kindergarten teachers, day-care workers, and mothers-have been unable to assert "clinical authority," much less transform it into political, economic, or social legitimacy for themselves. (p. 11)

Although there has been a long history of activism in early childhood education (Cannella & Bloch, 2006), Ryan and Ochsner (1999) have also pointed to early childhood educators' lack of authority and legitimacy to address social inequities significantly, engage in social action, and bring about social justice for children, families, and early childhood educators. Ryan and Ochsner also maintained that "reconstructing the knowledge base to expand our definitions of what constitutes good teaching" (p. 15) is required.

In this article, I explore the quandary of an early childhood educator's authority. Drawing on a range of feminist educational philosophers and critical pedagogy theorists as well as post-foundational researchers focusing on authority and teacher identity formation (Applebaum, 2000; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Hanrahan & Antony, 2005; Luke, 1996; Maher, 2001; Moss, 2006; Munro, 1998; Ryan & Ochsner, 1999), I examine a traditional understanding of authority and its limitations. I then draw on alternative understandings of authority that may make it possible for authority to be explicitly taken up and taken back by early childhood educators as a legitimate teacher behavior. I propose that this authority can be used for influencing and instigating action for social goods. For the purposes of this article, social goods are understood to be what we want for children, families, and early childhood educators. However, these social goods are collectively negotiated, renegotiated, defined, and redefined in multiple sites at the local, state, and global levels. My general argument is that a denial of an early childhood educator's authority in both theory and practice has "several potentially disabling consequences" (Luke, p. 3) for early childhood educators themselves and for the social actions and changes envisaged by many of them. Moreover, I suggest that early childhood educators cannot wait for society to accord them authority and status; rather, they need in practice to claim and assert an authority on their own terms.

The underlying premise of this exploration of an early childhood educator's authority is an understanding of the teacher as subject and agent in the theoretical and discursive formation of a professional identity. Post-foundational educational researchers reject a universal, unitary, static, coherent, and complete notion of *teacher* (Grieshaber, 2001; Moss, 2006). Rather, they view

teacher identity as particular, multiple, dramatic, incoherent, and incomplete to emphasize the complexities of identity formation. Some of these researchers have explicitly linked identity formation with the issue of female authority. Munro (1998), in a study of female teachers, explored both the impossible "fictions" of teaching to which female teachers have been subjected (i.e., to be a teacher one must possess authority, knowledge, and power in a transmission pedagogy, but as a woman one cannot possess any of these), and teachers' individual "fictions" or stories about their working lives created in the condition of being a subject who is on the margins of school life. Here the teacher is seen as active, embodied with agency, or as an actor engaged in creating a dramatic teaching life story. In her 1992 critical ethnographic study, Britzman (1992) used the notion of subjectivity to contend that "it is within our subjectivities" that teachers make sense of "competing conditions even as these competing conditions 'condition' our subjectivity in contradictory ways" (p. 57). Bakhtin's (1986) concept of "heteroglossia" is employed by Britzman to describe "the polyphony in the schools and surrounding culture" that shape how we become and identify as teachers (preface). Britzman also distinguished between Bakhtin's explanation of authoritative (dominant knowledge structures) and internally persuasive discourses (alternative ways of seeing and knowing things) to examine the contradictory realities in the experiences of teachers. These realities, complexities, and difficulties of teaching guide how I work through the quandary of an early childhood educator's authority to reclaim authority for advancing social goods.

Traditional Authority

The *Penguin English Dictionary* (2003) defines authority as follows: "1) the power to issue directives accompanied by the right to expect obedience 2) the position of a person who has such power: *those in authority*." In the traditional sense, then, an individual person with authority has strong influence, power, and control over others who must obey, and this authority can be justified on the basis of institutional position or disciplinary expertise alone. Criticisms of traditional authority have come from various quarters. In critical pedagogy, traditional authority is closely linked to a transmission model of teaching or to "banking education" (Freire, 1998). Freire described five oppressive operations that are enforced by the impersonal authority of the "banking instructor": (a) teaching methods make students passive learners; (b) the student mind is considered empty to be filled by the teacher's knowledge; (c) students are required to regurgitate pre-digested (by the teacher) knowledge; (d) students accept received knowledge as the truth; and (e) the student's world view becomes the teachers' rather than one's own. In these operations, diversity among the students (e.g., learner differences) and relationships between the teacher and students are not of primary importance (Applebaum, 2000, "The Avoid Power-Over Argument," para. 7). In early childhood education, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) describe the connection between the child and teacher in transmission pedagogy: "the lacking child requires a teacher who is the privileged voice of authority" (p. 103).

Liberal feminist theorists maintain that in both public and private social life, men exercise authority or are granted authority on the basis of perceived superior qualities. Thus authority is seen as patriarchal and coinciding with a

hierarchical system, objectivism, and competitive individualism (Luke, 1996) Traditional teacher authority has been considered particularly problematic because it is exercised at the expense of the learner's freedom (Bingham, 2002; Maher, 2001). To counter these problems, feminist educational philosophers as well as critical pedagogy scholars have emphasized avoiding "masculinist power and control" over students" (Applebaum, 2000, "The Avoid Power-Over Argument," para. 1) and instead "sharing power with or empowering students in an effort to distribute classroom authority more evenly and to diminish potentially negative effects of traditional classroom hierarchies" (Ropers-Huilman, 1997, p. 336). For some, feminist pedagogy meant rejecting power and authority altogether to commit to pedagogies of nurturance and caring (Applebaum).

Although authority as a teacher behavior may be rejected, Luke (1996) has suggested that it is often present in practice but camouflaged as something else. This is because "everyone is not only affected by power, but also to some extent exercises it; we are governed but also govern ourselves and may govern others, to a greater or lesser extent" (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 29). Here I discuss two possible areas of practice where authority makes a camouflaged appearance: group management and teacher-direction. Early childhood educators work with large groups of children, calling attention to the authority need to carry out related roles and responsibilities that is typically "unsayable" (Foucault, 1972). Educators' ambivalent views on managing large groups of children seem to be reflected in the use of terms such *discipline* versus *guidance*. Smedley (1994) remarked that women are expected to demonstrate the contradictory qualities of nurturance and group management in classroom settings. Miller (1996) has argued that the whole question of teacher's authority has become confounded with, and trivialized and buried in, the theory and practice of classroom discipline. My own research has suggested that to circumvent discomfort with the term *authority* when educators work with large groups of children, early childhood educators use a "softer" version of authority, *self-confidence*. Thus when a particular educator needs to be better at "managing" groups of children, she requires greater self-confidence.

Furthermore, because authority is a taboo subject and not open to honest discussion, it may be expressed in group management strategies that are often covert, distorted, defensive, and inauthentic. Leavitt's (1994) study of the caregivers in an infant and toddler center recorded how the caregivers, unable to express or suppress certain feelings, pathologized children's behavior, and then belittled and dismissed children's emotional responses. Yet these caregivers claimed that they were child-centered. The caregivers' individual actions created what Leavitt called an emotional culture in which daily practices, regulative norms, caregiver beliefs, and the caregivers' emotional labor constructed a child who experienced a loss of self or an anti-self. This description of an "anti-self" could, I suggest, apply also to the teachers whose practices become inauthentic and far removed from their own teaching beliefs. One contributing factor to this distancing between theory and practice may be our collective inability to make explicit, particularly through critical reflection, how we do and do not exercise our authority with young children.

Ryan and Ochsner (1999) noted, "Early childhood teaching tends to be reduced to two dominant stereotypes: that of the good sensitive, and nurturing developmentally appropriate educator, or his/her antithesis, the autocratic developmentally inappropriate educator" (p. 14). Many observers in early childhood education have found that teacher-direction appears to be a common pedagogical approach despite a general mandate for early childhood educators to adopt child-centered pedagogy. Indeed, the image of the teacher at the front of the class with a pointer in hand is surprisingly dominant (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Although not discounting a range of explanations for the extent of teacher-direction in practice, I suggest that teacher-direction may represent one way for an early childhood educator to assert and express his or her desire for authority and receive some recognition and respect. Teacher-direction positions the early childhood educator in a potentially different relation from that of others, a position that reflects a certain degree of authority and knowledge. Teacher-direction, therefore, may be a conscious and/or unconscious attempt to combat and manage perceived marginality. In teacher-direction, there is an obvious public demonstration of authority, and an early childhood educator becomes more visible and employs various behaviors (e.g., sitting in front of a group of children) that signify authority in social relations.

McArdle and McWilliam (2005) have suggested that it is not necessary to create a binary in which educators have to camouflage their authority because a nurturing educator does not use authority. This contrasting "disallows the investigation of pedagogy as a more complex field of practice, one that is inevitably riddled with unresolved and unresolvable contradictions and tensions" (p. 324). McArdle and McWilliam drew on Haraway's (1991) use of ironic categorization, which examines the tensions in the propositions inside the categories of analysis rather than setting these up as discursive oppositions. This allowed McArdle and McWilliam to take up "the challenge of locating a space for thinking and speaking and enacting practice that might incorporate both 'freedom' and 'structure,' both 'facilitating' and 'teaching' … by insisting that both of the opposing terms of the binaries are necessary for speaking the truth about … education" (p. 328). "Teacher-directed, child-centered pedagogy" could be described as one of these ironic categories and may reflect what happens in the formation of a teacher identity and the experiences of early childhood educators (Haraway). Articulating these difficult and complex expressions of authority is an important step in reclaiming an early childhood educator's authority.

Taking Authority Back
Despite the alignment of authority and patriarchy, some scholars have questioned feminist and critical pedagogy's overreliance on the notions of nurturance and caring and sought to take authority back by removing the "undesirable characteristics of traditional authority" (Applebaum, 2000, Introduction, para. 4). "Unconditional giving and selfless support," two characteristics of the maternal image of nurturance, have been found to be particularly problematic for female teachers (Applebaum, Nurturance Revisited, para. 2). Woodrow and Busch (2008) have added that "although these 'Mary Poppins' images are now outdated and perhaps whimsical, the values of caring and nurturing are still perpetuated in the [early childhood]

profession's discourses" (p. 89). These characteristics of caring and nurturing have been linked to welfare-state discourses that produce essentialized identities in order for the caring society to be legitimized. In these discourses, women are given the moral authority and the roles of caretakers and midwives of public welfare in the private and domestic domains of home and schools (Dillabough & Acker, 2002).

Luke (1996) explored the epistemological and pedagogical consequences resulting from a feminist pedagogy that eschews all claims to power and authority to be loyal to commitments to nurturance and caring. Luke's conclusion was that feminists have to stand on one or the other side of the nurturance/authority binary. Luke recommended that "progressive" educators "disengage from their anxieties about authority and power" (p. 302), stating, "We do need to take authority—or at least, make explicit that we already embody and exercise authority even in its camouflage of pastoral nurturance. Second, we do need to acknowledge and theorize the power we variously exercise."

Applebaum (2000), in a response to Luke's recommendation, maintained that it is possible, at least in her role as an educational philosopher and an educator, for feminist pedagogy to embrace both nurturance and authority. She described a "relational authority," which "can dissolve the sharp dichotomy between nurturance and authority" (Introduction, para. 4). To build her theory of relational authority, she tackled the notions of nurturance (maternal and caring) and authority and found in both a narrow understanding. In contrast to viewing authority based on power, control, and enforcement, Applebaum (Relational Authority, para. 4) maintained that authority can be "the power to influence and inspire action, opinion and beliefs" and it can be "mixed with a nurturance in which relations and connectedness do not have implicit demands of selflessness and unconditionality." For Applebaum, the concept of relational authority implies "reciprocal experiences and relationships" (Relational Authority, para. 4), and a teacher's knowledge and authority that takes relationships with students seriously has to be "demonstrated" to students so that they can see what is of value. In the relational notion of authority, the teacher asks: Who he or she is? And who are the learners? Applebaum concluded that feminist authority is not an oxymoron and that it is possible to have *authority with* as opposed to *authority over* students.

In ruminating on the progressive male educators who inspire her own teaching, Maher (2001) found that they possess authority, but "their authority is a kind of magic; early failures are overcome through the teachers' idealistic commitments to the students." In contrast, female teachers with authority were viewed as villainous and "archetypical spinsters" (p. 14). At the same time, Maher suggested that the teacher who is solely committed to nurturance often fails to recognize the unequal power relations that exist in the classroom: "the teacher's relative passivity in the name of facilitation actually leaves in place and reinforces the power relations brought into the classroom from the outside society" (p. 27). Maher maintained that thinking about differences (i.e., sex and race) as forms of unequal power relations can help reframe the grounds for the teacher's authority and for the teacher's "active intervention in the power dynamics of the classroom" (p. 28). In other words, Maher argued that if

teachers do not possess the authority to intervene, then in practice social inequities in the classroom are perpetuated. Thus

> the teacher's authority is not set in opposition to the child's "freedom," but seen as a set of relations that can be acknowledged, as grounded in teachers' and students' evolving (and various) connections to each other, the curriculum, and the classroom and societal setting. (p. 28)

Similarly, Bingham (2002), in his analysis of Freire's "banking instructor," concluded that authority can be "on the side of freedom" when there is dialogue between the teacher who can also be a student and a student who can also be a teacher. Drawing further on the psychoanalytic work of Benjamin (1995), Bingham described how an authoritative balance can function so that authority does not "succumb to the unwanted psychic extremes of domination and submission" (p. 448), but rather remains a dynamic and intersubjective process in which conditions of authority, vulnerability, and excess are sometimes practiced by the teacher and sometimes by the student.

Feminist philosophers Hanrahan and Antony (2005) also distinguished legitimate authority from objectionable authoritarianism and argued that the "exercise of authority should be preserved" because "it enables feminists to coordinate their efforts to achieve larger social goods" (p. 59). Hanrahan and Antony questioned (in reference to higher education) "the motives [of those] most vociferous in their assaults on the notion of pedagogical authority" (p. 61) just at the moment when women are more broadly in society acquiring greater authority to achieve larger "social goods." Hanrahan and Antony described their potential feminist theory of authority as follows.

> Authority is legitimate when it is constructed by means of a substantively grounded, procedurally proper system of authorization—that is one involving a marking system that tracks satisfaction of the grounding conditions and that is bound by procedural mechanisms permitting complaint and redress. Authority structured in this way … should enable us to reap the benefits of collectivity, without the risk of authoritarian abuse. Women should persuade themselves that legitimate authority is possible and summon the courage to claim it. (p. 78)

Ryan and Ochsner (1999) illustrated this legitimate authority in their examination of the gender-equity practices of two United States kindergarten teachers. These teachers moved beyond the dichotomy of the nurturing early childhood teacher and the autocratic one to find an image of the early childhood teacher who takes "a proactive and explicit political stance with children against social inequalities" (p. 14). One of the kindergarten teachers said,

> I use my power and authority as the teacher to hold issues about gender up to the light for students to see. It's amazing to me that thinking and talking about something is a form of social action. And what you put out there to think about and talk about during workshare is powerful. (p. 17)

An Early Childhood Educator's Authority Reclaimed
Drawing on a range of scholars' views on authority, I build an argument that proposes that we make explicit or render visible an early childhood educator's authority. In the above sections, I describe what this authority might be like. It should not be authority over others, and it can be distinguished from the

objectionable authoritarianism described by Hanrahan and Antony (2005) and from the banking model described by Friere (1998). This authority, mixed with nurturance and caring and based on respectful and trusting relationships (Applebaum, 2000), would be exercised to address social inequities, take social actions, and promote social goods. Thus the quandary for early childhood educators is no longer whether "to have or not to have authority," but rather "how can an authority mixed with nurturance and caring be practiced?" recognizing that this practice will be "riddled with unresolved and unresolvable contradictions and tensions" (McArdle & McWilliam, 2005, p. 324). Thus authentic, internally persuasive discourses of an early childhood educator's authority are coordinated with dominant knowledge structures of authority to produce particular and multiple teacher identities that are highly complex.

What does this reclaiming of authority mean in practice to early childhood educators? I have found Smith's (1999) description of the three properties of all individual and collective subjects (and agents)—knowledge, judgment, and will—useful for understanding how an early childhood educator might practice authority in relationships with others. These properties are particularly useful for this understanding because they can be located inside the actualities of an early childhood educator's everyday experiences. It is important to note that the enactment of relational authority is in reality a collective practice because it involves relationships with others: children, families, and colleagues, who bring multiple perspectives on the practice. For example, when educators co-construct with children understandings of human differences, when they work with children on social justice projects, and when they advocate with others for public funding, they engage in collective enactments of authority. Inherent in this collective work are the complexities in determining social goods and the processes of decision-making and conflict.

Knowledge. Early childhood educators have authority when they are knowledgeable. Their knowledge consists of information, understanding, or skills acquired through learning or experience. Being knowledgeable means that an early childhood educator has knowledge or is well informed and has expertise. In my view, acknowledgment of this authoritative knowledge and expertise is critical for making the pedagogical work of early childhood educators visible and legitimate. Miller (1996) put it succinctly: the knowledge and skills of teachers must not be considered simply a reflection of "instinctive, innate capacities in women" (p. 106). Furthermore, without this authoritative knowledge, which can consist of knowledge about, for example, early childhood policies, governments, and activist strategies, early childhood educators cannot "coordinate … efforts to achieve larger social goods" (Hanrahan & Antony, 2005, p. 59). As Hanrahan and Antony have stated, we need the courage *to claim* this knowledge as legitimate in order to advance what we want for children, families, and ourselves.

In my view, really at issue here is the nature of this knowledge—for other knowledge bases claimed by other "experts" produce varied kinds of authoritative early childhood educators. Moss (2006), for example, has described the connection between technology of quantification as a modernist discourse and the image of the early childhood worker as a technician.

> Their role is to apply a defined set of technologies through regulated processes to produce pre-specified and measurable outcomes. The technologies and processes include working with detailed and prescriptive curricula (or similar practice guidelines), programmes and similar procedures to regulate methods of working, and using observation and other methods to assess performance against developmental norms and other standardised outcome criteria. (p. 35)

It is clear from Moss's description that an early childhood educator as a technician does not produce and possess his or her own authority; he or she simply translates, as Finklestein (1988) has remarked, other experts' theories into practice. Use of theories of developmental norms and other standardized outcome criteria as dominant knowledge structures of authority can result in an educator identifying children as having deficits and limitations. However, the educator as a technician may question and resist various processes that regulate his or her teaching practices and assert authoritative knowledge based on his or her own and others' experiences in the local early childhood setting.

In contrast to the teacher as technician, Moss (2006) described the teacher as "researcher who is constantly seeking a deeper understanding of existing knowledge and new knowledge, in particular of the child and the child's learning processes" (p. 36). The teacher's research is part of everyday practice, and new knowledge emerges from "creating knowledge in relationship with others and also with theories, concepts and analyses from many different fields" (p. 36). An early childhood educator's knowledge as a researcher is not fixed, but changes and grows as a result of coordinated interactions with others, multiple perspectives, and varied social and historical contexts. Dahlberg et al. (2007) have argued that pedagogical documentation makes visible to others the coordination of knowledge acquisition in the early childhood setting and the pedagogical work of researching teachers.

The authoritative knowledge of a teacher as a researcher is different from that of a teacher as a technician. Unlike the technical teacher, the researching teacher possesses his or her own knowledge co-constructed with others out of the particular social and historical circumstances of the early childhood setting. Dahlberg and Moss (2005), in their description of a pedagogy of listening, considered the connection between the intelligent child and the intelligent teacher. They wrote:

> To extend intelligence to the child is not about replacing the teacher with the child, which is sometimes implied in extreme reactions to transmission pedagogy. It is not a case of inverting the traditional hierarchy, so that to be educated the child needs only to affirm what she or he already is. It does not mean the teacher should be just a passive listener, a mere sounding board off which the child bounces thoughts and theories. (p. 103)

Dahlberg and Moss described a teacher's complex role in "creating complexity in the child's environment and by introducing new theories, concepts, languages and materials, as tools for children's theorizing and meaning making" (p. 104). This intelligent teacher's education "should be broad-based and range over many areas, not just psychology and pedagogy" (p. 104).

Although claims to intelligence can contribute to power imbalances in various social interactions (e.g., teacher-family), an early childhood educator's claim that he or she does *not know* and *is not an expert* works against the ability

to advance social goods in the early childhood setting and in the broader society. In other words, early childhood educators need intelligence, expertise, and authority and "the power to influence and inspire action, opinion and beliefs" (Applebaum, 2000, Relational Authority, para. 4). Moreover, when an early childhood educator denies his or her knowledge achieved through education, ongoing practice, and experiences in concert with others and through reflection on practice and experiences, then I would argue that his or her behavior becomes inauthentic or a "performance." This lack of authenticity is particularly evident when teachers as technicians enact other experts' knowledge. We have all visited early childhood settings in which the language and interactions between teachers and children seem mechanical and routinized as the teacher becomes increasingly removed from his or her own teaching self. Under this condition of inauthenticity, early childhood educators cannot truly engage in critical reflective practice, which MacNaughton (2005) described as the ability "to analyse their implication in oppressive and inequitable power relationships with students and then use their analysis to work against that oppression and inequity" (p. 7).

Judgment. Early childhood educators exercise their authority when they make judgments, which are opinions and evaluations to reach decisions on their pedagogical practices. Early childhood educators make these judgments regularly throughout the day during transitions and routines, in setting out activities, and in their interactions with children and families. These judgments are always part of ordinary practices, and many of these practices involve negotiating social goods in the early childhood setting. However, as Dahlberg et al. (2007) have pointed out, these judgments should not be personal or expert, but rather collective. Personal judgments are individualistic and made in isolation from others, children, families, and teaching partners. Expert judgments are frequently divorced from early childhood educators' local knowledge and experiences with others. Moreover, Jones (1999) has described what traditional notions of authority intend to do: "suspend the process of judgement and decision-making as an on-going, conflicted, and collective process, and locate it in one, ultimate, sovereign point" (p. 108).

Dahlberg et al. (2007) argued that early childhood teachers have increasingly come to rely in their decision-making on "expert systems" of technical accomplishment or professional expertise grounded in standardization among other modernist practices. They contend that early childhood educators' foremost task is about "constructing and deepening *understanding* [emphasis in original] of the early childhood institution and its projects, in particular the pedagogical work-to make meaning of what is going on" (p. 106). They further explained,

> From constructing these understandings, people may choose to continue to make judgements about the work, a process involving the application of values to understanding to make a judgement of value. Finally, people may further choose to seek *some agreement with others* [emphasis in original] about these judgements—to struggle to agree, to some extent, about what is going on and its value.

Taking ethical responsibility for judgments and decisions is critical to the processes of judging pedagogical practices and the authority inherent in these

practices. Teachers who are technicians are more likely to locate responsibility for their pedagogical judgments and decisions in the "experts" who communicate what is best for children and families on the basis of standards and other quantitative measures. Moyles (2001) has also described how authoritative professional discourses tend "to engender a sense that responsibility and power lie outside the domain of the practitioner" (p. 82). The teacher who is a researcher, on the other hand, works explicitly with authoritative knowledge from inside and outside the early childhood setting and co-constructed with others, and thus needs to claim and take responsibility for his or her own judgments. Dahlberg et al. (2007) wrote: "judgements should be delivered not as a statement of fact but precisely as a judgement and be judged by others in turn" (p. 113).

Will. Early childhood educators exercise their authority through an expression of their will in relation to others. Will is defined as a desire, wish, intention, determination, or inclination and uses of the term can have positive (e.g., will-power) or negative (e.g., wilful power) connotations. This understanding of an early childhood educator's will requires us, as Luke (1996) has indicated, "to acknowledge and theorize the power we variously exercise" (p. 302). In explaining her theory of relational authority, Applebaum (2000, Relational Authority) wrote,

> In order to influence action, opinion and belief, and especially to inspire others, there must be a bilaterally active relationship; someone who inspires and someone who is inspired. To be inspired is not a passive state but rather, a transaction in which the one inspired actively relates with the one who inspires, and moreover, is altered in a deep sense by the relationship. (para. 4)

Thus an authoritative early childhood educator can influence, for example, how children view and interact with each other and how governments produce policies. But she considers how this exercise of her will is responsible, ethical, and works toward collective social good. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) have vitalized the place of ethics in the preschool, arguing for ethical approaches that foreground responsibility and relationships to others and that "require listening, reflection, interpretation, confrontation, discussion, and judgements open to question" (p. 13).

An explicit articulation of authority as will reveals that behind concepts like facilitation, free choice, and power-sharing, early childhood educators do exercise their will. Indeed, children know that this will and the social control is lodged in the adult. A teacher's will is evident in the scheduling and routines, at group times, and in other teacher-led/directed activities. There is no escaping that teachers lead and coordinate these daily events, so the question is not whether they do, but rather how they carry them out for promoting collective and social goods. This new question ensures that an early childhood educator's will is consciously and critically constructed out of experiences in a local and particular social and cultural community where teachers, children, and families exist. The question also requires a distinction between reflective practice and critical reflective practice that MacNaughton (2005) has described as: "Inserting the 'critical' into reflective practice … links education to a wider social project to create social justice and emancipation, and freedom of all through education" (p. 9). Critical reflection of an early childhood educator's

authority as knowledge, judgment, and will is a starting point for examining how early childhood educators can undertake this wider social project.

Conclusion

I propose that early childhood educators reclaim and articulate a relational authority expressed in practice as knowledge, judgment, and will. This reclamation could potentially contribute to a more complex understanding of the early childhood educator as subject and agent in the theoretical and discursive formation of a professional identity. This identity, although particular, multiple, and incomplete, could enable early childhood educators to articulate, influence, and inspire action, opinion, and beliefs as they work with others toward social goods in and outside the early childhood setting. In this pedagogical work, early childhood educators may also begin to develop a greater understanding of their own authority and how to use it for promoting social goods. In reclaiming authority on their own terms, early childhood educators may, as Luke (1996) puts it, "stake [a] public claim on the knowledge domains and institutional practices we want to transform" (p. 302).

The early childhood educator's ever-changing authoritative knowledge and judgments and will emerge from practical experiences with others and are understood in relation to theories delivered by expert systems. This process of linking theories from expert systems may potentially support the intra-active nature of a theory and practice of an early childhood educator's authority. Moreover, the process may begin to close a widening gap between practice and theory, particularly as views of the teacher as a technician intensify in most Western neoliberal states. A theoretical and practical move to reclaiming an early childhood educator's authority is particularly important with the increasing professionalism of the workforce. There are certainly advantages to developing professional institutions such as regulatory colleges to lift the early childhood education workforce out of a secondary labor market. But at the same time, these institutions are top-down expert systems that can increasingly define and regulate the early childhood educator, who may become more distant from understanding the possibilities of his or her own authority. One intention of this article is to explore these possibilities to bring early childhood educators closer to their own authority as a means of working toward social goods and change.

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