

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332800525>

# Alternative Narratives in Early Childhood, Or Why Contest Early Childhood?

Article · May 2019

CITATIONS

3

READS

894

1 author:



Peter Moss

UCL Institute of Education

172 PUBLICATIONS 5,315 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Calidad de la educación infantil y desarrollo de niños y niñas [View project](#)



International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research [View project](#)

# Alternative Narratives in Early Childhood, Or Why Contest Early Childhood?

by Peter Moss



Peter Moss is an emeritus professor at UCL Institute of Education, University College London. In recent years, he has helped to edit three books from Reggio Emilia, by Carlina Rinaldi and Veia Vecchi, and a selection of the writings and speeches of Loris Malaguzzi. These three books are part of the *Contesting Early Childhood Series* of which there are presently 18 titles. For more information about books within this series, go to <https://www.routledge.com/Contesting-Early-Childhood/book-series/SEO623>.

His other interests include the comparative study of early childhood policies; the relationship between care, employment, and gender, in particular parental leave policies, and men working in early childhood; and the relationship between early childhood and compulsory education. He lives in London.

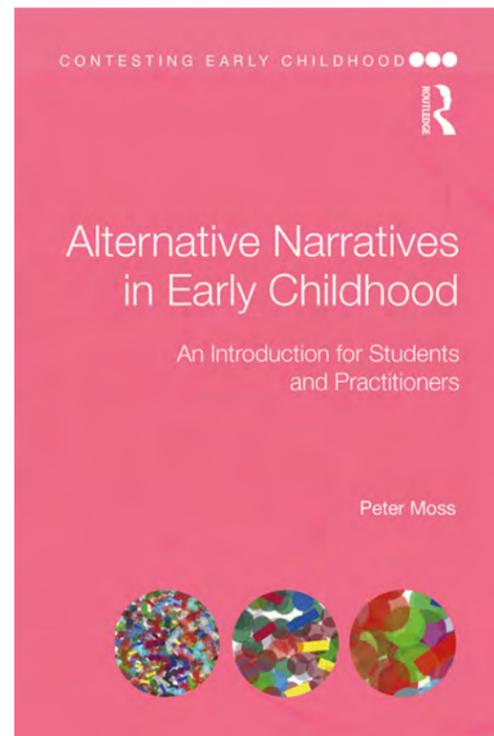
## Contesting Early Childhood Book Series

At the start of each book in the series *Contesting Early Childhood (CEC)* are these words:

This ground breaking series questions the current dominant discourses in early childhood, and offers alternative narratives of an area that is now made up of a multitude of perspectives and debates.

The series, which started in 2005, now has 18 titles including three from Reggio Emilia. I had the privilege of being the first editor, along with my Swedish colleague Gunilla Dahlberg. Although we handed over the role in 2016 (to Michel Vandenbroeck and Liselott Mariett Olsson), I remain closely involved and have written one of the latest books to appear in the series: *Alternative Narratives in Early Childhood (ANEC)*.

The book is an introduction, aimed at students and practitioners, to the series and some of the main ideas that appear in it. These ideas - concepts and theories - can open up new worlds. But they can also be daunting, difficult to grasp not least because they challenge the assumptions and beliefs that many people have become accustomed to and take for granted as self-evident. So, although the authors in the series ground the concepts and theories they write about in actual, concrete examples of practice, I have felt for some time the need to offer an accessible and enticing



introduction, to assist more people to enter the exhilarating and liberating world of *contesting early childhood*.

In this article, I would like to introduce you to the new book, hoping you will want to dip deeper into it and that new world. Let me start by exploring two key terms: *narratives* and *dominant discourses*.

## Narratives and Dominant Discourses

The stated aim of the *Contesting Early Childhood* series connects three important ideas: the importance of narratives or stories (I use the two terms inter-changeably); the power of certain narratives - or dominant discourses; and the existence of other narratives, alternatives that resist or contest dominant discourses. I will attempt to explain these ideas more clearly. (For more on this, see Chapter 1 in ANEC.)

First, the *importance of narratives*, that is the stories we hear and tell, for how we interpret or make meaning - of ourselves and our lives, of our families and other relationships, and about what goes on around us. As Jerome Bruner recognised, mankind has an innate tendency to communicate and to make sense of existence through stories; they are how we make meaning of our world and our place in it, rendering our existence meaningful. This idea is captured by the Dark Mountain Project, an American environmental group, who write that they “believe that the roots of [the converging crises of our times] lie in the stories we have been telling ourselves. . . . We will reassert the role of story-telling as more than mere entertainment. It is through stories that we weave reality” (Dark Mountain Project, 2009a).

Stories, then, construct or weave reality for us and, as such, have consequences, sometimes bad ones, for example justifying the destructive relationship that mankind has developed with the environment (and other exploitative relationships). Confronting this, the Dark Mountain Project is

walking away from the stories that our societies like to tell themselves, the stories that prevent us seeing clearly the extent of the ecological, social and cultural unravelling that is now underway. We are making art that doesn't take the centrality of humans for granted. We are tracing the deep cultural roots of the mess the world is in. And we are looking for other stories, ones that can help us make sense of a time of disruption and uncertainty (Dark Mountain Project, 2009b).

Stories, then, are how all of us *weave reality*; they help us explain and justify what we think and do. Depending on your perspective or viewpoint, stories can be good or bad, enchanting or disenchanting, have beneficial or harmful consequences, trap us in dysfunctional positions, or help us to move on. But whatever their consequence, they are stories. Perhaps the biggest danger of all is when we forget that our stories are just that - stories, believing instead that they are some revelatory and fundamental truth.

This leads me to a second idea: the existence of *dominant discourses*. We live in a world of stories, or discourses, ways of thinking and talking about things. Within this multitude of stories or discourses, certain ones can become particularly influential. For the Dark Mountain Project, as crises multiply and worsen, stories of human separation from and mastery over the environment become increasingly incredible and lose their power to convince. But they have and still wield great influence, shaping economies, societies, and how many people think and act, in short weaving reality. They have become, in the words of French philosopher Michel Foucault (the subject of Chapter 5 in ANEC), dominant discourses.

Dominant discourses become dominant when powerful institutions (e.g., governments, business, professional organisations, the academy) take them up and reproduce them in a symbiotic relationship between discourse and power. They become stories that have a decisive influence on a particular subject, for example early childhood education, by insisting that they are the only way to think, talk, and behave: that they are the only reality. They seek to impose, in Foucault's words, a *regime of truth*, through exercising power over our thoughts and actions, directing or governing what we see as *the truth* and how we construct the world or weave reality. Typical of dominant discourses is that they “make assumptions and values invisible, turn subjective perspectives and understandings into apparently objective truths, and determine that some things are self-evident

We live in a world of stories, or discourses, ways of thinking and talking about things. Within this multitude of stories or discourses, certain ones can become particularly influential.

and realistic while others are dubious and impractical” (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p.17). This is simply how things are, the dominant discourse asserts: no need to add any qualifications, to say “in my opinion” or “it seems to me” or “from my perspective.”

By behaving in this way, by insisting they are the one and only truth, dominant discourses stifle alternative discourses or stories. They exclude, or attempt to, other ways of understanding and interpreting the world, of weaving reality, marginalising, or drowning out other stories. A person putting forward an alternative story is dismissed, as out of touch with reality, living in the past, not knowing what they are taking about, or some other put down. In short, dominant discourses seek to impose a “dictatorship of no alternative” (Unger, 2005a), or Mrs. Thatcher’s TINA - there is no alternative. Shortly, I will introduce what I think is the most dominant discourse in today’s early childhood education.

Which brings me to the third idea: *the existence of other narratives, resisting or contesting dominant discourses*. A discourse may be dominant, yet it never manages totally to silence other discourses, or stories. Some will always speak out and contest the dominant discourse for, as Foucault contends, “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). For if there was to be no resistance, the relationship would no longer be one of power but simply of slavery, and we are not reduced to that relationship, certainly not in education. Resistance is to be found in many shapes and sizes. It finds expression in many alternative stories that give voice to the multitude of perspectives and debates in early childhood. These stories may be unheard by power and consigned to the margins, for the time being at least, but they are out there to be heard by those who choose to listen. I will give an example later.

These three ideas - the importance of narratives or stories, the dominance of some, and the possibility of resistance to such dominance - explain the title for the book, *Alternative Narratives in Early Childhood*, and the series, *Contesting Early Childhood*. The basic premise of both is simple. Early childhood education can be viewed from many different perspectives. There is no one objectively true viewpoint, rather there are

There is no one objectively true viewpoint, rather there are many ways of thinking about, talking about, and doing early childhood (or any) education.

many ways of thinking about, talking about, and doing early childhood (or any) education. Therefore, there are many stories to be told, alternative narratives, each one of which deserves listening to and each one of which can be questioned or contested - and in particular those that become dominant discourses.

Some may find this an unsettling prospect, a source of anxiety and uncertainty. From my perspective, the alternative narratives and the multitude of perspectives and debates from which they are derived are not only inevitable but something to be welcomed, reflecting a world rich in diversity. This prospect is invigorating, since encounters with difference can provoke experimentation, movement, and new thinking. It is, moreover, a necessary condition for a democratic politics of education, since democracy requires the creation, articulation, and valuing of alternatives, and confrontation and contestation between them. In healthy and vibrant democracies, contesting early childhood, meaning confrontation and debate between a multitude of perspectives, should be an everyday and everywhere occurrence, whether in services themselves, in their surrounding communities, in the academy, or among policy-makers and politicians. It is both sad and worrying that this is not happening today, or not nearly enough, leaving a democratic politics of education that is in the same moribund state as democracy in general. Rather than vibrant and exciting debates about diverse contemporary projects and different visions for the future, education like so much else has come to be dominated by one or two stories and how best to manage things to ensure their enactment; a stultifying dictatorship of no alternative.

### A Dominant Discourse in Today’s Early Childhood

What is this dominant discourse in today’s early childhood education? One of the chapters in the *Contesting Childhood Education* series, *Transformative Change and Real Utopias in Early Childhood Education* (Moss, 2014), is titled “Two early childhood education stories: Quality and high returns and markets.” Most of you will be familiar with the first of these stories (the story, at least, if not the title), for it appears frequently in international and national policy documents, adopted uncritically by policy-makers who have heard it first from an array of researchers and other experts.

In a nutshell the story goes like this. Find, invest in, and apply the correct human technologies, i.e., *quality*, during early childhood and you will get high returns on investment including improved educational and economic performance and reduced social problems - and we all live happily ever after. These human technologies include child development concepts; knowledge and vocabularies; developmental and learning goals; early years curricula; pedagogical and other programmes, such as developmentally appropriate practice; the authority of various experts; child observation techniques and normative assessment methods; regulatory and inspection regimes; *dataveillance* (digitally augmented surveillance, for example, the monitoring of children and centres through analysis at a distance of test and other data); positivistic research; and more besides. Bradbury and Holmes (2017) discuss in greater detail the notions of *dataveillance* and *datafication*.

The story seeks credibility by appeal to certain theories drawn mainly from branches of psychology (child development) and economics (human capital); certain so-called iconic research studies (mainly longitudinal studies conducted in the US in the 1960s, 70s and 80s); and certain authority figures, usually selected academics. The story is imbued with a particular tone and style - instrumental; calculative; economic; technical; avid for certainty, control, and closure - and a distinctive vocabulary, with frequent recourse to words such as *evidence-based*, *programmes*, *quality*, *investment*, *outcomes*, *development*, *effects*, *returns*, and *human capital*. Last but not least, the story is entirely lacking in self-criticism or awareness of possible alternative narratives.



Why has this story become so dominant today? Why do we talk so much, and so unquestioningly, about quality and high returns in early childhood education, effortlessly adopting its singular vocabulary? These are big questions, and space precludes detailed answers. Suffice it to say, I think it is no accident that the rise of the story of quality and high returns coincides with the ascendancy of an even bigger story, the meta-narrative of neoliberalism, which currently dominates politics in much of the world. This story tells of a world in which all human relationships and actions can be understood in economic terms, driven by competition, calculation, and (individual) choice; in which management and technical practice are harnessed to maximising returns; and in which all human beings act in the spirit of *homo economicus*, i.e., economically rational, always seeking to optimise returns through the exercise of free choice, an autonomous and self-serving consumer. In this political and economic context, the story of quality and high returns makes perfect sense, feeling so much at home that it comes to seem natural and self-evident - the only show in town.

But once aware there are alternatives, the story of quality and high returns is neither natural nor self-evident. Indeed, it can seem to be both unappealing and dangerous, offering a narrow and impoverished view of education and life, and leading to an early childhood education steeped in regulation and control. Moreover,

But once aware there are alternatives, the story of quality and high returns is neither natural nor self-evident. Indeed, it can seem to be both unappealing and dangerous, offering a narrow and impoverished view of education and life, and leading to an early childhood education steeped in regulation and control.

even considered in its own terms, the story of quality and high returns seems incredible. The *iconic studies* it draws on so heavily have been criticised – but no mention is made of this. And even if we do accept, without question, the results of such local studies, there is no evidence that *quality* early childhood education has, by itself, made any difference at a *national* level. This is true of Head Start, where it is difficult to discern any impact on child or adult outcomes for the USA as a whole, but also elsewhere. Naomi Eisenstadt, who led the English government’s ambitious early intervention programme Sure Start for its first seven years, reflecting on “what I have learnt and what I have achieved,” concluded that the most important lesson for her

is the need to address inequality as well as poverty and low attainment. . . . We set out with Sure Start to improve the educational, social and emotional development of young children living in poverty so as to reduce the chances of growing up to be poor as adults. We have probably achieved the first part of that aim, but have been less successful in the second part. . . . I believe that without significant redistribution of wealth across social classes, where you are born and who your parents are will remain a significant determinant of life chances. . . . The expectation that early years services, however wonderful, could affect overall inequality was unrealistic. This shift will come from wider social reforms (Eisenstadt, 2011, pp.160-161).

Maybe this is because achieving a better society is a complex process, requiring serious political commitment to social justice; there is no technical fix or “magic potion” (Zigler,

2003) that can do the job. Tellers of the story of quality and high returns ignore the inconvenient evidence that inequality, which has grown in the USA (and elsewhere) in recent years, “seems to make countries socially dysfunctional across a wide range of outcomes” (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, p.174), more than outweighing any positive results from early intervention. (For a more detailed critique, see Moss, 2013, Chapter 2.)

### An Alternative Story

The good news is that there are other stories - alternative narratives - that can be told about early childhood education: stories with very different values, understandings, and practices. These are stories that prioritise politics and ethics over managerial and technical practices (politics and ethics as first practice is the subject of Chapter 3 in ANEC). They start from political questions, for example: What do we want for our children? What is the purpose and meaning of education? What are the fundamental values and ethics of education? What is our image of the child? How should we relate to each other? They do not start from technical questions such as: What works? These are stories that draw on a wide range of disciplines and theories. These are stories that are aware of the risks of early childhood education – but also believe in the possibilities of an education that might contribute towards a more democratic, caring, just, and sustainable world.

Among these stories is one that might be called *the story of democracy, experimentation, and potentiality*. This story takes democracy as a fundamental value of education, experimenta-

Among these stories is one that might be called *the story of democracy, experimentation, and potentiality*. This story takes democracy as a fundamental value of education, experimentation as a fundamental principle of pedagogical work, and potentiality as a fundamental belief about children and adults alike.

tion as a fundamental principle of pedagogical work, and potentiality as a fundamental belief about children and adults alike. A fundamental belief in potentiality warrants that the potentiality of us all is great and unknowable, quite simply incalculable, a matter of and . . . and . . . and . . . As the 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza puts it “We never know in advance what a body can do.” Or, in the words of the philosopher and educationalist John Dewey, human experience can “have no end until experience itself comes to an end.”

When it comes to choosing ethics, the story of democracy, experimentation, and potentiality makes a clear choice: the ethics of care and the ethics of an encounter. The ethics of care involves both particular acts of caring and a “general habit of mind that should inform all aspects of life” (Tronto, 1993, p. 127), and which includes attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. The ethics of an encounter seeks to relate to the Other in a way that respects the Other’s uniqueness and resists making the Other into the Same, contesting the will to know that is so powerfully present in the story of quality and high returns, with its desire to standardise, measure, and classify – a desire that is full of dangers. As Gunilla Dahlberg has observed:

Putting everything one encounters into pre-made categories implies we make the Other into the Same, as everything which does not fit into these categories, which is unfamiliar and not taken-for-granted has to be overcome. . . . To think another whom I cannot grasp is an important shift and it challenges the whole scene of pedagogy. It poses other questions to us pedagogues. Questions such as how the encounter with Otherness, with difference, can take place as responsibly as possible (Dahlberg, 2003, p. 270).

If the vocabulary in the story of quality and high returns affirms the instrumental, the technical, the managerial, the reductive, and the economic, the vocabulary in the story of democracy, experimentation, and potentiality affirms relationships and responsibility, immanence and emergence, diversity and complexity, the ethical and political, with words such as *projects, potentialities, and possibilities; uncertainty, wonder, and surprise; in-between, lines of flight, and rhizomes;*

*images, interpretation, and meaning making; democracy, movement, and experimentation.* Contesting early childhood is therefore at least in part about contesting language.

### Paradigms and Theories

The role of theory and paradigm are vital to contesting early childhood. Different stories draw on different *theories and theorists*, or different ways of trying to make sense of the world and our place as humans within it. As already noted, the dominant discourse draws in particular on theories in two disciplines – child development in psychology, and human capital in economics. The story of democracy, experimentation, and potentiality, and indeed most of the books in the *Contesting Early Childhood* series, draws on very different theories from a wider array of disciplines. You will find authors working with Foucault’s theories of power relations (the subject of Chapter 5 in ANEC), with Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of experimentation and creative thinking (Chapter 6), with Levinas’s theory of the ethics of an encounter, with Barad’s theory of agential realism (Chapter 7), with complexity theory and its various proponents, and with much else besides.

*Paradigm* (the importance of which is the subject of Chapter 2 in ANEC) can be understood as the lens through which each of us views the world and makes meaning of it, a combination of beliefs, values, and understandings (or theories) that adds up to our perspective on life. Or it can be understood as the particular position from which we view the world, a particular position that gives us a particular perspective. Because of paradigm, our take on things is necessarily perspectival, partial, and provisional; there is no possibility of being above the world, of adopting a *god’s eye view* that is objective and universal.

Paradigms are, like stories, diverse and complex, but I will simplify here to clarify the point. The dominant discourse, the story of quality and high returns, views the world through the lens of the paradigm of positivism. This paradigm believes the world can be truly understood through the discovery of universal, stable, and replicable laws, objectively arrived at through processes of measurement and reduction that overcome (control for) com-

plexity and context. With natural science as an ideal, this paradigm puts much faith in the figure of the objective, rational, and authoritative expert, who is able to muster the evidence that reveals how things truly are and what we must do to change them.

By contrast, a story such as that of democracy, experimentation, and potentiality views the world from the position of what might be termed a paradigm of post-foundationalism. Truth, from this perspective, is not something that is absolute and immutable, or out there awaiting discovery by an impartial scientist, but is “the contingent product of particular, situated ways of comprehending the world” (Otto, 1999, p. 17). Indeed, it is better to speak of truths, not the Truth. And if the positivist values and seeks certainty, control, and objectivity, the post-foundationalist welcomes and seeks to work with complexity, uncertainty, and unpredictability.

This has profound implications. Paradigm is a choice, not an inevitability. We can change paradigm, and to do so is also to change how we understand what a human being is, can be, and should be (ontology); what knowledge and learning is, can be, and should be (epistemology); and what relationships are, can be, and should be (ethics). And these changes, in turn, have profound consequences for policy, provision, and practice, not the least for early childhood education. I take issue with the tellers of the story of quality and high returns for failing to acknowledge what they have done: adopted a paradigm and taken a position, which is just one of many they could have adopted. To take a position and acknowledge you have made a choice is one thing; to take a position and behave as if it is the only one, is quite another and smacks of myopic arrogance.

### Reggio Emilia: Contesting Dominant Discourses in Practice

As I said at the beginning, Reggio Emilia has a major role in the CEC series, with three titles from and about that city’s early childhood education. I return to Reggio in ANEC (Chapter 4), explaining why this Italian experience is so important to those wanting to contest early childhood. Not, I argue, because it is a transferable programme or universal blueprint

that, properly applied, can provide a panacea for early childhood education. For, it seems to me that the education undertaken in the municipal schools is best understood not as an *approach*, implying a generalisable model, but as a *local cultural project* that has emerged from a very particular time and place.

From my perspective, there are three reasons for the importance of this local cultural project. First, it shows what can be achieved by local communities or groups with the courage and imagination to engage in what Roberto Unger has termed “democratic experimentalism,” which is further described as “the organisation of a collective experimental practice from below. . . [in which democracy is] the most important terrain” (Unger, 2005b, pp. 179, 182). If Reggio Emilia has achieved something special educationally, “a collective experimental practice from below,” then such democratic experimentalism can surely happen in some other places - where conditions are right. Indeed, it can and has happened, as there are numerous other examples of innovative local projects in early childhood education in other parts of Italy and far beyond.

Second, Reggio Emilia challenges the dictatorship of no alternative and the story of quality and high returns. For Reggio has had the

courage to think for themselves in constructing new discourses, and in so doing daring to make the choice of understanding the child as a rich child, a child of infinite capabilities, a child born with a hundred languages; [and] building a new pedagogical project, foregrounding relationships and encounters, dialogue and negotiation, reflection and critical thinking; border crossing disciplines and perspectives (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013, p. 129).

In this way, the city shows that there are alternatives, such as creating their own narrative, which might indeed be called a story of democracy, experimentation, and potentiality, and by so doing has proven other worlds are possible, where other stories cannot only be told but enacted, and not only enacted but sustained.

Finally, Reggio Emilia demonstrates the importance of working with political questions as a basis for building up early childhood education. They do so explicitly, being quite upfront about doing this: for, to repeat

Finally, Reggio Emilia demonstrates the importance of working with political questions as a basis for building up early childhood education. They do so explicitly, being quite upfront about doing this: for, to repeat Malaguzzi’s clearly stated view, education is “always a political discourse whether we know it or not. It is about working with cultural choices, but it clearly also means working with political choices” (Cagliari, Castagnetti, Giudici, Rinaldi, Vecchi and Moss, 2016, p. 267).

Malaguzzi’s clearly stated view, education is “always a political discourse whether we know it or not. It is about working with cultural choices, but it clearly also means working with political choices” (Cagliari, Castagnetti, Giudici, Rinaldi, Vecchi and Moss, 2016, p. 267). By doing so, by asking and answering political questions, by making political choices, Reggio Emilia acts as a provocation to the rest of us. Why do we often find it hard to recognise that education is, first and foremost, a political practice? What are our political questions? Do we agree with Reggio Emilia’s political answers?

### Why Does Contesting Early Childhood Matter?

I have already touched on one reason why it is important to contest dominant discourses, offering instead a diversity of narratives about early childhood education. Such diversity is a precondition for a democratic politics of education, in which politics and ethics are first practice, which in turn is an important element in a democratic society.

A second reason for contesting early childhood is because, in Foucault’s words, “everything is dangerous.” What Foucault is getting at is that however well meant something is, however virtuous its proponents may be, however worthy its goals, there are always harmful risks attached. This is because power relations are always present, and these relations inevitably lead to attempts to govern and control others. In Foucault’s words,

[i]n human relations, whatever they are - whether it be a question of communicating verbally . . . or a question of a love relationship, an institutional or economic relationship - power is always present: I mean the relationship in which one wishes to direct the behaviour of another (Foucault, 1987, p. 11).

Foucault, and his compatriot, Gilles Deleuze, have delved into the means, the *human technologies*, through which such direction is exercised, and it is clear that over time these have become more pervasive, invasive, and powerful, capable of shaping not only our behaviour but our desires, fears, and pleasures; of forming the very ways we think about things and about ourselves: capable in short of governing the soul. Early childhood has not escaped this process.

As Foucault constantly reminds us, we can never escape power relations. One way to mitigate the dangers is to create an environment of critical thinking around all forms of early childhood education—to treat all stories (including the story of democracy, experimentation, and potentiality) with caution and scepticism, seeing every narrative as having the potential both to emancipate and to govern. In short, to create an environment where contesting early childhood is accepted practice, where analyses of power relations are routinely brought to bear on narratives, and where no narrative can ease its way unchallenged to claim it is natural, neutral, and the only show in town.

The CEC series seeks to contribute to the creation of a critical environment. But necessary as critique is, and I think it very necessary, it is not enough; there must also be hope. The series offers hope in two connected ways. First, by the alternative narratives offered, alongside diverse paradigms and theories, showing that there are other ways of thinking and talking about early childhood education. Second, by demonstrating how those alternatives can be put to work, enacted in real, concrete situations. Whether in preschools in Sweden (Olsson, 2009; Moss, 2013; Davies, 2014) or in kindergartens in New Zealand (Sellers, 2013) or in childcare centres in Australia (Taylor, 2013), or in the municipal schools in

The CEC series seeks to contribute to the creation of a critical environment. But necessary as critique is, and I think it very necessary, it is not enough; there must also be hope.

Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi, 2006; Vecchi, 2010; Cagliari et al., 2016), the series offers evidence of experimentation, of movement, and of possibility—confirmation that another world is possible if we so choose.

### The Resistance Movement

I am certainly not naïve enough to think that a few books, however good they may be, will change the world of early childhood education and remove the dictatorship of no alternative. So, what might the series, realistically, hope to achieve? Before attempting an answer, I need to situate the series in a wider context.

I have already said that resistance is to be found in many shapes and sizes. Developing this theme, it seems to me that CEC is part of a growing international movement that is both critiquing the dominant discourse and exploring and creating alternative narratives. This might be thought of as a resistance movement confronting the dictatorship of no alternative, forming a global network of alternative storytellers from which new thinking and new ways of working are constantly emerging. Others in the resistance include the Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education movement (<http://www.receinternational.org/>); the many individuals and organisations linked to and inspired by the early childhood education in Reggio Emilia; and the many practitioners, students, and academics who are actively engaging with alternative narratives, exploring different paradigms and theories, whether in their everyday work, their postgraduate theses, their research, or their publications. Indeed, there is a burgeoning resistance literature—the CEC series is not alone.

The dominant discourse may have powerful backers and loud voices, and certainly has most of the resources and influence, but it has become static and repetitive, unable to respond to a world of complexity, diversity, and multiple perspectives. The resisters relish this world and seek ways to do it justice; they draw on rich traditions such as progressive education and critical pedagogy. Viewed in this context, the CEC series provides one of several public arenas for opening up a multitude of perspectives and debates for exploring connections with radical traditions, and where alternative narratives can be told to a global audience.

My hope is that the dominant discourse will be put back in its place as just one of many stories, as a local narrative that once upon a time got beyond itself and claimed to be the universal truth.

My hope is that the dominant discourse will be put back in its place as just one of many stories, as a local narrative that once upon a time got beyond itself and claimed to be the universal truth. For those who believe, with good historical justification, that times and regimes change, that stories come and go, the important point is to be ready when change comes, ready with other stories to tell and with well-developed ideas about how these stories might be enacted. In this respect the economist Milton Friedman, the Godfather of neoliberalism, offers excellent advice, writing way back in 1962 about the task for neoliberals at a time when they were living through the post-war hegemony of social democracy and their story struggled to get a hearing:

Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable (Friedman, 1982, p.ix).

*Contesting Early Childhood* is in its modest way trying to develop alternatives, and to keep them alive and available, ready for the crisis and the subsequent transformative change that will depose the story of quality and high returns from its dominant position.



Peter Moss and Marina Castagnetti during a NAREA Alternative Narratives lecture series

### REFERENCES

- Bradbury, A., & Roberts-Holmes, G. (2017). *The datafication of primary and early years education*. London: Routledge.
- Cagliari, P., Castagnetti, M., Giudici, C., Rinaldi, C., Vecchi, V., & Moss, P. (Eds.) (2016) *Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia: A selection of his writings and speeches 1945-1993*. London: Routledge.
- Dahlberg, G. (2003). Pedagogy as a loci of an ethics of an encounter. In M. Bloch, K. Holmlund, I. Moqvist, & T. Popkewitz (Eds.). *Governing children, families and education: Restructuring the welfare state* (pp.261-286). New York, NY: Palgrave.
- Dahlberg, G. and Moss, P. (2005). *Ethics and politics in early childhood education*. London: Routledge.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (2013). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Languages of evaluation* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London: Routledge.
- Dark Mountain Project (2009a). *The eight principles of uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain manifesto*. Retrieved from <http://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/>.
- Dark Mountain Project (2009b). *About*. Retrieved from <http://dark-mountain.net/about/>.
- Davies, B. (2014). *Listening to children: Being and becoming*. London: Routledge.
- Eisenstadt, N. (2011). *Providing a sure start: How government discovered early childhood*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, Volume 1: An introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1987). The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom. In J. Bernauer, & D. Rasmussen (Eds.). *The final Foucault*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Friedman, M. (1982). *Capitalism and freedom*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1962)
- Moss, P. (2014). *Transformative change and real utopias in early childhood education: A story of democracy, experimentation and potentiality*. London: Routledge.
- Olsson, L.M. (2009). *Movement and experimentation in young children's learning: Deleuze and Guattari in early childhood education*. London: Routledge.
- Otto, D. (1999). Everything is dangerous: Some poststructural tools for human rights law. *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 5 (1), 17-47.
- Sellers, M. (2013). *Young children becoming curriculum: Deleuze, Te Whāriki and curricular understandings*. London: Routledge.
- Taylor, A. (2013). *Reconfiguring the natures of childhood*. London: Routledge.
- Tronto, J. (1993). *Moral Boundaries: A political argument for the ethics of care*. London: Routledge.
- Unger, R. M. (2005a). *What should the left propose?* London: Verso.
- Unger, R. M. (2005b). The future of the Left: James Crabtree interviews Roberto Unger. *Renewal*, 13 (2/3), 173-84.
- Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*. London: Allen Lane.
- Zigler, E. (2003). Forty years of believing in magic is enough. *Social Policy Report*, XVII (1), 10-11.