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ece@2000.aotearoa.nz: Mapping the Landscape of the "Century of the Child"[1]

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Abstract:

The "Century of the Child" was so named in 1900 by the Swedish writer Ellen Key. In its concluding year, this chapter sketches some maps of childhood in "Aotearoa New Zealand" in terms of:

- *changes in how our society has viewed "children before five";*
- *the emergence of institutions outside of the family to care and educate the "before fives";*
- *different constructions of "before five" childhood and child institutions for Maori and Pakeha;*
- *the present context of early childhood services sited amidst new economic and political discourses that are transforming the role of the state.*

Traditionally the *New Zealand Annual Review of Education* has considered the most recent education issues. Cumulatively this has created a detailed map of educational change over time, in a variety of different fields. But during 2000, appraising the politics of the previous year has become less important than making sense of the millennium, the century and even the decade. The focus of this article, therefore, will be much broader than simply the politics of early childhood – but not for reasons of nostalgia. Our present is embedded in the complexities of our past, and the map of the future cannot be charted upon a clean slate.

"The Century of the Child"

Ellen Key, a Swedish feminist with vision wrote a book called *The Century of the Child* in 1900. Key attributed the ills of the "modern

world" to failures in childrearing and envisaged a more moral society if the state invested in supporting childhood. Her book became a best-seller and indeed, the twentieth century was characterised by campaigns calling for state investment in the health, welfare and education of children. A huge industry surrounding childhood was the result.

This chapter sketches some maps of the "century of the child" in relation to early childhood in "aotearoa.nz". It is now a decade since the *Before Five* reforms (Lange, 1988), and it is also timely to position these within the century. Mapping the future is harder. Even Ellen Key got it wrong. Her vision was for children to be reared by "trained" mothers at home. To Key, the nineteenth century discovery of the kindergarten and nursery were second best. One hundred years later Key would not care to see the widespread attendance of preschool aged children at state supported institutions outside of the home. The idea that this is a good thing for all children was not prevalent a century ago. However, in New Zealand by the 1950s those children not attending preschool came to be regarded as unfortunate; by the 1960s, disadvantaged; by the 1970-80s, disenfranchised; and by the end of the century, "at risk". Such perceptions reflect shifts in opinion regarding the rearing of young children. Opinion depended partly on the class and ethnicity of a child, and was informed by a century of research on children, their learning and development. Shifting perceptions also depended on whether a particular early childhood institution was considered a good or bad thing for young children. Views on the latter changed markedly.

The Discovery of Early Childhood (May, 1997), detailed the emergence of early childhood institutions in New Zealand as European colonial endeavours. "Discovery" ended half way through the "century of the child" after a war, which galvanised support for the State to invest in "preschool education". The sequel, *The Playground of Early Childhood* (May, in press) examines the postwar partnership of early childhood with the State. This chapter sketches some maps which may be useful for making sense of the "seesaws, swings and roundabouts" in the "political playground" of early childhood education in "aotearoa.nz".

Map One: Constructing "Before Five" European Childhood

There is increasing interest in the study of childhood as an historical and cultural construct (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). This assumes that within particular times and/or places societies perceive the value, the role, and the rearing of children differently. Mapping the historical

landscape of childhood in western societies has been a recent preoccupation. Most well known is Phillip Aries' (1973) study of European childhood prior to the seventeenth century. He presents a thesis of the child as a "miniature" adult. For children "before five" where a stage of dependent infancy was discernible, the dominant image was of the "madonna-mother and child" – a mythical contradiction to the more brutal realities of "before five" childrearing. Elizabeth Badinter's study (1980) of eighteenth-century urban French early childhood seeks to demonstrate that mother love is a recent construct. She argues that a lack of motherly interest allowed childrearing practices that saw most infants, within a few hours of birth, transported to rural wet nurses. The small proportion that survived returned to their parents around the age of five. The discovery of "domestic motherhood" in the nineteenth century ended the practice. An American study by Viviana A. Zelizer (1985) documents how the economic value of children changed between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Children who once contributed to the family income at an early age became a cost to families. More particularly infants, who previously had little value on the adoption market, became "priceless" in emotional and monetary terms during the twentieth century.

There has been little mapping of the landscape of childhood in New Zealand. A still useful piece of work in relation to European childhood is by Dugald McDonald (1978). He identified four significant constructs:

- Pre 1900s – the "*child as a chattel*" for whom the state had no interest or rights of intervention;
- Post 1900s – the "*child as social capital*" for whom state investment in health and education was intended to create a useful adult citizen and prevent social disorder;
- Post 1945 – the "*child as a psychological being*" whose mental health required support and understanding by parents and institutions. The outcome was to be a more sane society;
- Post 1970s – the "*child as a citizen*" who had rights derived from ideals of a fairer society.

James Belich (1995) questions the thesis of the "chatteled" child whose life improved under the increasing intervention of the state. He suggests instead a "wild colonial child" whose independence was tamed and constrained by new child institutions such as schools, kindergartens and clubs.

The *Discovery of Early Childhood* traces new ideas on childhood that emerged in eighteenth century Europe, and spread to New Zealand with colonial immigration, and describes:

- the increasing value placed on child survival;
- new understandings of early development that suggested new approaches for rearing and education; and
- strategies separating young children from the adult world into the nursery, school, kindergarten, foundling home, orphanage, or reformatory. (May, 1997)

These ideas were an expression of new doctrines of political liberalism, capitalism and the ideals of the bourgeois family. Their impact was variable depending on economic class, locality and individuals involved.

During the "century of the child" many of these ideas on childhood moved from the experimental to become universals for all children, under the umbrella of the state. This was not accidental, and coincided with the intricate mapping of childhood by a new industry of child professionals. Sociologists AlisonJames and Alan Prout (1997, p. 9) write how:

> "The century of the child" can be characterised as such precisely because of the massive corpus of knowledge built up by psychologists and other social scientists through the systematic study of children. If the concept of childhood as a distinct stage in the human life cycle crystallised in nineteenth century western thought, the twentieth century has seen the theoretical space elaborated and filled out with detailed empirical findings [which have] structured our thinking about childhood.

The twentieth century view of the child has been dominated by the explanations of developmental psychology, that presumed a universal view of the development of children as separate, but leading to adulthood (Burman, 1994). Laboratory nurseries in Europe and the United States were the site of research, which constructed the stages of "normal" development for the bodies and minds of all children. These new understandings brought increasing scrutiny into the lives of children and their parents. Nikolas Rose (1990, p. 121) writes of the "gaze of the psychologist" and claims:

> Childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence. The modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual and moral

> danger, to ensure its "normal" development, to actively promote certain capacities or attributes such as intelligence, educability and emotional stability.

James, Jenks and Prout (1998, p. 17) argue further, that:

> Developmental psychology firmly colonised childhood in a pact with medicine, education and government agencies.

The developmental map constructed for the preschool child was the most intricate and vulnerable. This justified more intensive oversight by state agencies and parents. Early childhood institutions have played a pivotal role in constructing particular views of children and how they should be reared. They have been at the forefront of pioneering the new, as well as agents in regulating the accepted views of the time. Berry Mayall (1996, p. 52) suggests:

> Health visitors, pre-school staff and social workers do not take over the functions of the family; [but] they intervene in private lives to regulate what goes on in the family. They teach mothers to aid and abet the models proposed.... The pre-school child is defined in certain ways through the teaching of these professionals, acting as agents of the state. For instance the model pre-schooler is co-operative, friendly, alert and obedient. Mothers must learn that they must school their child to be fit to engage with school social and academic norms by the time they reach the age of five.

The physical "child@2000" was still recognisable from the physical "child@1900", although much improved in health and survival chances. However, there were considerable shifts in childrearing practices, the provision and programmes of early childhood institutions, family structures, government legislation and intervention, the economics of childhood and the emergence of a professional and commercial industry surrounding childhood. "Childhood@2000" is unlikely to be static and as the writers above note, early childhood institutions are both regulators and innovators.

Map Two: "Century of the [Maori] Child"

The "century of the [Maori] child" was not the same as that of the Pakeha child. In 1900, with political colonisation complete, the lives of the indigenous Maori child and the colonial Pakeha child were far apart.

> Colonial society created both the need and the impetus for charitable and educational services for European children; but for Maori, it brought about the loss of population, land, mana, and language. These factors are at the crux of later early childhood services, as Maori families lost the resource and social structures which provided the traditional contexts for rearing the very young. (May, 1997, p. xiv)

Amidst increasing physical, cultural and economic connection during the second half of the century, the new child measures of the colonisers became the required norm for both Maori and Pakeha childhood. During the postwar years Maori preschoolers became more visible in Pakeha suburbs and cities and in the occasional kindergarten. Maori preschool-aged children became the focus of educational intervention by both Pakeha and Maori. Issues of European colonisation were central.

Colonisation caused Pakeha to construct views of Maori childhood which bore little resemblance to the realities for Maori children and/or Maori perceptions of childhood. In coming to understand the institutions of early childhood for both Maori and Pakeha it is important to deconstruct some Pakeha images of Maori childhood.[2]

- Late nineteenth century photographers and artists provided two powerful images of the young Maori child for the European world. Firstly, the anthropological child on his or her mother's back with both mother and child attired (possibly for the occasion) in traditional dress. A parallel but mirror image was the Maori mother and child attired in Victorian garb, portraying an ideal of successful colonisation and assimilation.
- In the twentieth century the Maori child became a focus of commercial interest. Early postcards portrayed Maori children bathing in hot pools, jumping for pennies, and performing haka for tourists. There are few other images in the public domain. The children were photographed in the main as playful "urchins", although sometimes corrupted by European vices.
- During the early years of the "century of the child" the fate of many Maori preschool children was only "visible" as mortality statistics in Pakeha records. The parallel to this was the increasing interest in Pakeha infant survival made prominent by the work of Sir Truby King. The Maori leader, Maui Pomare also used the saying "save the babies to save the nation", but Pomare was talking about Maori babies. Both cultures were beginning to address issues of survival.
- The surviving Maori preschoolers became visible to Pakeha attention when they arrived at school speaking only Maori. Rapid

and sometimes harsh Europeanization was the solution to the "problem". Images of young Maori children in "native" schools emphasized order, regimentation and cleanliness. The images remain unchanged alongside those of Pakeha children, whose early education was becoming increasingly playful amidst the paint, water and junk.

- The increasing physical proximity of Maori and Pakeha children brought common measures for success or failure, and a new focus on the Maori child as a problem and a failure. Preventing the problem brought the early years under scrutiny. For example, during the 1950s individual kindergartens provided statistics of "special home circumstances". A typical list is revealing of the perceptions of normality of the time:

  3 children whose mothers work full time
  1 fatherless child – mother divorced
  1 Dutch child
  1 Chinese child
  4 *Maori children* [author's emphasis]

- By the 1960s the problem was perceived in terms of cultural and economic disadvantage. Ans Westra's photographs in *Washday at the Pa* (1964) portrayed the economic poverty of playful Maori children in homes where appliances and European furnishings were absent. Both Maori and Pakeha felt uncomfortable with the starkness of the images. The context of disadvantage and the perceived need for the Maori child to "catch up" to Pakeha children underpinned preschool initiatives for Maori children in the 1960s.
- These images still remain. The Maori child is still a statistic. The starkness of the mortality statistic has been replaced by myriads of reports on the health and educational "problems" of Maori children. These "realities" have fueled a raft of interventions and solutions, often in the context of early childhood services.
- During the last two decades some counter images have started to emerge, this time constructed by Maori. Most visible are images of the Maori infant as a competent language learner, who attends Kohanga Reo. Maori-constructed images of the Kohanga Reo child skilfully combine language and cultural prowess, a sense of institutional and whanau protectiveness, and a warning that these competent mokopuna will need reckoning with as they grow older and more politically powerful.

These insights are fleeting, but can be seen as a preliminary attempt to map the diverse landscape of childhood and its institutions that we have constructed in "aotearoa.nz".

Map Three: Political Gazes

In understanding the role of the state in relation to early childhood provision it is useful to expand Rose's view of the psychological "gaze" in governing childhood. The gaze has been broader than psychological. Throughout the "century of the child" in "aotearoa.nz", the rationales for state interest and investment in early childhood – for both Maori and Pakeha – shifted to accommodate new perceptions of childhood, education and welfare. The state became an increasingly active partner, but cloaked its gaze in precise ways, politically acceptable at the time.

- ***"Morality gaze"***: In the late nineteenth century, government interest in the fledgling kindergarten movement came via the patronage of prime ministers and politicians of a philanthropic endeavour claiming to inculcate moral habits in children of the colonial poor. That kindergartens did much more was understood, but political interest of the day was concerned with the issues of urban disorder.
- ***"Physical gaze"***: From 1909 free kindergartens received a small subsidy in the context of charitable aid. The first half of the "century of the child" was characterised by increasing government interest in the health and bodies of children. The "gaze" of the state investment was primarily framed around the physical. Truby King and Plunket were the acceptable face of government interest. Kindergartens packaged their programme as an extension of Plunket regimens. The reality was softer and kinder. During these years the young Maori child and his or her mother also came under increasing scrutiny from a public health service extending into rural areas.

The second world war marks a divide, presenting direct government investment in preschool education as a good idea for all Pakeha children. There was still no reference to Maori preschool children. By mid-century, researchers, educationists and welfare policy makers were sufficiently convinced that the mainstream institutions of childhood should incorporate new psychological insights of development. Socialised and happier children (which in itself was a new idea), and adjusted adults in a saner world was the vision. Dr C. E. Beeby, a key

architect of postwar education policy, claimed that "if schools could turn out the right kind of individuals, they could surely help to produce a more just society" (Beeby, 1992, p. 51). Reforms spearheading these ideas swept throughout all education institutions and welfare services for children (Dalley, 1999). Three broad political "gazes" have cloaked rationales for interest and investment in early years care and education. Each brought a new kind of political and pedagogical language but the "gazes" are not exclusive and each was layered on top of previous rationales.

- ***"Psychological gaze"***: By the 1950s a broad psychological paradigm deemed the mental health of children as important. "Understanding" parents and teachers, and the playful participation of children were now the crux of successful learning. By mid-century, developmental psychology advocated fulltime mothering. Preschool institutions were situated alongside the home as a support for mothers, a site of expert advice and a backup where mothers failed. Mothers and preschool institutions were portrayed as key agents in socialising children to become well-adjusted citizens. Perceived "disorders" such as illegitimacy, delinquency, and working mothers were "understood" in psychological terms. Early childhood services were classified as acceptable or unacceptable by the state, according to whether they were deemed to cause or cure such disorders. By the 1960s there was such international optimism that even a President presumed a "headstart" at preschool could cure poverty and educational disadvantage (Zigler & Valentine, 1979). The ideas were applied in New Zealand in the context of education for Maori preschool children.
- ***"Liberation gaze"***: The ideals of an orderly socialisation of children through early psychological intervention was not sustainable. The diversity of culture and life styles, behaviours and experiences of families could not always fit within the defined boundaries of normality and adjustment. So called disorder was symptomatic of wider social and economic issues. From the late 1960s older understandings of childhood were overlaid by sociological and political insights particularly in relation to the rights of minority groups, women and children. Beeby (1986, p. 53) later conceded:

> It was not till the 1960s that social research showed how profoundly students, whatever their abilities, can be

> handicapped throughout their whole school life by the social and racial background from which they come. Some obstacles to school progress that are glaringly obvious to us now were hidden from us in the 1940s.

New understandings of education generated radical critiques of schooling and highlighted the inadequacies of older views. Educational institutions were perceived by some as tools of an oppressive state, but also the basis for liberation. Programmes and institutions for children should be empowering, not just for themselves but also for their family and/or their culture. For example:

- Views were expressed that the state and men should shoulder more responsibility for childcare (May Cook, 1985);
- Campaigns concerning the rights of women politicised mothers, early childhood workers and kindergarten teachers to demand a better deal (Dann, 1985);
- Campaigns for indigenous rights, Maori language concerns and new understanding of the Treaty spilled into the arena of early childhood education (Pewhairangi, 1983).

Early childhood institutions were a testing site for the possibilities of intervention and investment. There was optimism that oppression and inequity in society could be overcome. The state, however, was a more cautious participant as the "gaze" shifted to find the cause within the colonial, capitalist and patriarchal structures of the state itself.

- ***"Economic gaze"***: By the 1980s the state had again been persuaded that more investment in early childhood was warranted. Ironically, this was paralleled by the desire to downsize its earlier "cradle to grave" welfare policies, towards new codes of individual, social and family responsibility (Kelsey, 1995). Devolving responsibility did not, however, mean less scrutiny. The state became active in shaping constructions of childhood linked to global economic agendas. National curricula across the education sector were promulgated, with nationally defined "learning outcomes" and "essential skills" required to participate in a new "enterprise society". A culture of audit and assurance imported from the world of business management became operative throughout government agencies (Boston et al, 1999) which also affected early childhood

centres. The "gaze" shifted to include the systems and policies of early childhood practice. Audit trails required surveillance and evidence. The tools of child observation were co-opted towards sighting the measurable outcomes of learning amongst the minutiae of children's daily activities.

Despite the shifts described above, the assumption that young children learn through play was the dominating discourse of the century, but rationales for the benefits of play were realigned to fit new constructions of childhood. In the early postwar years the benefits of play were explained in terms of the psychological wellbeing of the child. From the late 1960s issues to do with children's rights impacted in various ways on the environment for playful learning. By the end of the century the benefits of play were still surviving but the child at play was subject to more rigorous theoretical scrutiny. The state was demanding evidence that marketable skills would be an outcome of play in the early years.

Map Four: Windows for Change

There have been two "windows" for substantive policy rethinks in the government's investment in the early years: the late 1940s and the late 1980s. Both "windows" were the culmination of decades of persuasion. Each campaign was backed by powerful pedagogical and political rationales. In 1947 the Government released its postwar blueprint for early childhood education, the *Report of the Consultative Committee on Preschool Education Services*, known as the Bailey report after its Chair, Professor Colin Bailey. In 1988 *Before Five* was released as government's response to *Education to be More* (1988), known as the Meade report after its Chair, Dr Anne Meade. The key differences can be summarised:

- The Bailey report called for the state to take over early childhood education with the view that, "The voluntary principle is generally repugnant in that it carries overtones of charity" (1947, p. 9). In contrast the Meade report and its successor *Before Five* were linked to education reforms seeking to devolve educational management from the state.
- The Bailey report was concerned with part day preschool education for three and four year olds in kindergartens. Other services were perceived as temporary (playcentres) or unnecessary (day nurseries). The Meade report recommended a policy framework for early childhood services: from birth to five years; in centres and

homes; including care and education; full- and part-day; and inclusive of a diverse range of cultural and philosophical approaches.
- Kindergarten was intended as the main beneficiary of the Bailey Report. The Meade report focussed on other services, with the designation of kindergarten as a "flagship" (Davison, 1997) in relation to funding and qualifications.

But in spite of the 40-year time difference there are still similarities:

- Despite concerns over details, both reports received submissions urging the government to move swiftly to deal with the crises at hand.
- Both reports were part of a political mood for educational reform, and early childhood issues were able to "catch onto the coat tails".
- In both eras, early childhood was positioned as a political priority for social policy, and both reports were optimistic concerning the impact of the state's investment in individuals, families and the nation as a whole.
- The recommendations of neither report were fully implemented. Both were introduced with staged plans that failed to get beyond year one. However, the state's investment in the early years did increase, and in the case of the Bailey report, guided policy for forty years. Likewise, the principles of the Meade Report still survive.
- Both initiatives were under Labour Governments and linked to policies to support women and families. In both cases a National Government came to power soon afterwards, in 1949 and in 1990. The impetus for action was slowed and finance curtailed. Nevertheless, there was still an upturn in provision and participation in the years that followed.
- The implementation of new policies was fraught for both, particularly as respective governments sought to increase their scrutiny of programmes.

The intervening years were not lacking in development. Numerous innovations, and increasing participation, demonstrate that much was achieved. The frustration for those working in the field was managing the demand, development and delivery of services with insufficient funding, along with incomplete and, for some groups, restrictive policies.

Map Five: ece.nz@1990s

It is a decade since the educational reforms. There has been much written on the implementation of the *Before Five* policies, but it is useful to move beyond the detail of this scrutiny, towards an understanding of the contradictory processes underlying the decade. These processes include:

- ***investment* ↔ *disinvestment:*** Government increased its financial investment in early childhood education with participation rates for all ages and ethnic groups increasing. This was paralleled by a new culture of government disinvestment in family, education and welfare services towards a code of family and individual responsibility.
- ***devolvement* ↔ *surveillance:*** Government promoted policies of devolvement in education towards ideals of "community control" and the "self managing school". Devolvement was paralleled by increasing intervention in the everyday detail of early childhood programmes through new audit and assurance systems.
- ***diversity* ↔ *standardisation***: Diversity of provision and philosophy was a key policy plank, particularly in the context of parental choice and cultural politics. Nevertheless there was increasing standardisation and quantification via national curricula, uniform regulations and a view that everything could be packaged and delivered according to agreed quality standards.
- ***decolonisation* ↔ *globalisation***: During the last two decades of the century New Zealand underwent increasing political and cultural decolonisation from Britain and the USA. A parallel process operated in the context of Maori and Pakeha politics. Issues of cultural identity and self determination such as "being Maori" or "being Pakeha" were expressed in early childhood politics too. On the other hand, New Zealand as a nation, and early childhood institutions as a specific example, became subject to an increasing culture of global and/or national "universals" which sought to reduce the complexities of difference to simpler truths.
- ***seamlessness* ↔ *separation***: New education policies were portrayed as a "seamless" educational progression from home to early childhood; school to tertiary education. The view was that a cohesive progression of skills laid down in the early years would produce an economically productive adult at the tertiary end. Administration was streamlined with educational agencies attempting to implement seamless policies with seamless staff. However, as early childhood institutions moved under the seamless umbrella new strategies emerged to ensure separation. Early childhood curriculum and training remained distinctive and separate to school systems (These are positives!). On the other hand government resisted moves to ensure seamless remuneration and funding between early childhood and the school sector.

Summary

The maps of the shifting landscape of early childhood institutions during the "century of the child" are unconnected. They are attempts to deconstruct the myths, impose order on the detail, and make sense of our past. There are diverse histories of early childhood and diverse constructions of these histories. If another "window for change" is to be thrown open it is necessary to understand our past and construct a forward vision and strategy map that unites the diverse interest groups and wins political acceptance. This has never been easy, but unless the early childhood groups are active in the map's construction there is the danger of early childhood becoming the site of experimentation with someone else's blueprint. Early years education is now taken seriously. This is the potential problem as politicians, parents, and schools see institutionalised early childhood years as the solution for too many things, possibly forgetting about babies needing to be babies and children needing a childhood. Early childhood professionals have to be clear on their role. Early childhood has always been a site for experiment. The issue is "whose blueprint" will guide future development. It is important to be active, not passive in the construction of this blueprint, because the lesson of history is that the new century's "before five" childhood is likely to be considerably different from the childhood of 2000.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was presented as a keynote address to the 7th Early Childhood Convention in Nelson, September, 1999.
2. These images have been collected from mainstream books, magazines and visual materials widely available to pakeha. At the Convention these were illustrated on screen.

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