

Intersections

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This paper is written on data from [+] literature studies connected to my PhD project. In this project I study the intersections of policy, research and practice in the early childhood education and care-field, with attention to [+] early literacy, as it is a subject that easily gets colonized by dominating discourses of [+] school readiness and quality assurance. [+] Thus early literacy teaching is framed as teaching the 'basics' of reading. And thus early literacy teaching is primarily pointing into school readiness and the textbooks of the first years of school, while it might just as well be framed as a practice based on the children's perspectives and kindergarten traditions.

[+] I am interested in discourses, power and marginalization. [+] In the crèche I question images of the needy, lacking child alongside images of 'normal development'. I aim to contribute to spaces for thought and practice [+] beyond normalizing techniques of developmental stages and evidence-based, best practice. It is in part [+] a philosophical and political critique drawing on the Didaktik-tradition, and as such it is a contribution to the larger democratic project about supporting the early childhood education and care field in using contextualized knowledge, documentation, collaborative experimentation and curiosity to [+] maintain and develop caring relations, meaningful, child-centered activities with engaging and stimulating content.

[+][+] This critique of governing thru evidence and standards is a humanistic project as well for the child's direct benefit: The child gets to grow up in a crèche in a [+] world where universal truth is questioned, where domination and marginalization is opposed, and where dehumanising technocratic approaches to public management are contested. It is for the benefit of THE child - right in front of you - that he or she is viewed as fundamentally ungraspable and multiple, instead of being totalized and normalized by universal categories and effective practices (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

[+] Contemporary early childhood education and care -policy tends to focus on [+] competences and skills defined by testable standards. Standards can be viewed as society's expectations for how well the individual child profits from day-care, school, etc. Tests are introduced to determine [+] to which degree a given child lives up to these

expectations (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 85). Elsewhere, I have described this as a move towards a technocratic "skills-and-testing framework" (Jensen, Broström, & Hansen, 2010, p. 252). **[+]** ...

[+] The Danish Ministry of Finance has developed quality assurance tools to focus on "quality" and the "documentation of results" (Ministry of Finance, 2009, p. 2). Seven tools have been made to measure quality. Some of the tools concern practices in a given day-care facility, and others are used to **[+]** compare the practices/results of different day-care facilities. The tools have **[+]** indicators that define what counts as quality in the kindergarten, as well as the crèche. **[+]**

The development of normalizing standards and practices is not solely a matter of policy; the educators who work with language acquisition request empirically based knowledge and norm-based descriptions to guide them (Bleses, Vach, Wehberg, Faber, & Madsen, 2007, p. 9). In the day-care facilities, the educators are responsible for pointing out which children are at risk with regards to language acquisition (Bleses, Højen, Jørgensen, Jensen, & Vach, 2010, p. 5; The Day-care Facilities Act, 2011). It is estimated that 25% of all children will undergo a language assessment (Center for Child Language, 2010). This assessment will categorize the child as in need of a special, a focused or a general language stimulation practice (Bleses et al., 2007).

[+] Some municipalities even **[+]** devise their own school-readiness tick-off lists from the broad and open-ended national day-care curriculum. Even though **[+]** standardized aims and simplified methods are growing on the municipality level (Broström, 2009, p. 4), it is important to clarify that the current Danish early childhood education and care sector, with regards to practice and policy, is nowhere nearly as standardized as is the case in the UK, the US and other countries inscribed in the standards-based "readiness for school" model identified by OECD (2006, p. 63). As Broström (2006) notes, Danish **[+]** educators are free to make concrete content out of the broad curriculum themes. But as my colleague Ole Henrik Hansen asks: To which extent do the educators in fact **[+]** utilize this freedom to create rich experiences for the youngest children in the crèche? From a Didaktik standpoint it is not enough to be critical of tests - you also have to establish

criteria for, and select-, content and teaching methods, and for structuring the day in accordance with the children in front of you. Following Moss' (2007) argument for bringing politics into the nursery, **[+]** I argue for critical Didaktik in the kindergarten, as well as in the crèche.

[+] Biesta (2007) argues that the concept of evidence and the discourse of evidence-based practice transform educational research and practice. A double transformation (p. 2) is underway: **[+]** Educational research is less and less left to the opinion of the researcher, and increasingly linked to centralized (or strategic) agendas focused on what works through systems of grants, tender documents and applications. In a minute I will give a brief example of this with the so-called Language Pack. As research changes, so does practice. **[+]** Pedagogic practice should no longer be left to the opinion of the educator/teacher (individuals or groups), but should be based on findings from educational research; findings that tell us what works within education (Biesta, 2007). The researcher is both governed and governing him or herself in relation to (post-) positivist norms of causality, effect, and randomized controlled trials, while the educator and teacher is both governed and governing him or herself in relation to findings from research claiming evidence of what works. **[+]** Thus pedagogy remains free and decentralized, yet confined within discourses of quantifiable outcomes and accountability.

[+] The Language Pack (LP) is the result of a massive government grant to **[+]** make Danish crèches and kindergartens focus on language acquisition through research-based in-service training ("New Initiatives," 2010; Ministry of Social Affairs, 2010). **[+]** At page 12 of the tender document, the Ministry of Social Affairs describes the general aim of The Language Pack (LP). Here we find words and phrases such as **[+]** "latest knowledge and research", "knowledge" and "concrete tools". It is stated that the in-service training of LP must be based on the latest knowledge and research about children's language acquisition. A consortium consisting of three university colleges and one university won the bid and is now responsible for delivering the requested in-service training program. **[+]** The consortium's (2011) application states that the research base of **[+]** every aspect of LP will be secured through a meta-analysis review that follows international standards

(for what counts as evidence) (p. 6). **[+]** The results from this systematic review will be converted to evidence-based knowledge, methods and tools relevant in a Danish day-care context (p. 13). The consortium considers quality and the request for research-based in-service training based on the concept of evidence. **[+]** The Ministry of Social Affairs uses the broader term research based knowledge; the consortium goes the extra mile to ensure that research-based means findings generated primarily by RCT-designs and meta-analyses; that is, evidence-based knowledge.

[+] I have already mentioned that at least some early childhood education and care - practitioners request empirically based knowledge and norm based descriptions to work with language acquisition (Bleses et al., 2007, p. 9). Let us, for a moment, consider the situation in terms of the hen and egg problem: **[+]** practitioners request norms and evidence from research and policy which in turn inscribe the early childhood education and care-field in discourses of norms and evidence...

[+] In the paper you will find the topics just presented discussed in greater detail. **[+]** No technical truth, whether it is an economic truth, a psychological, biological or a methodological truth, should ever be allowed to colonize the larger democratic project about supporting early childhood education and care in using contextualized knowledge, documentation, collaborative experimentation and curiosity to maintain and develop caring relations, meaningful, child-centered activities with engaging and stimulating content.

You are welcome to take a printed copy on the way out. You can also send me e-mail, and I will reply with a PDF-version of the paper

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Introduction

- Literature studies connected to my PhD project
 - Early literacy
 - School readiness and quality assurance
 - Thus early literacy teaching is framed as teaching the 'basics' of reading. And thus early literacy teaching is primarily **pointing into school readiness and the textbooks** of the first years of school, while it might just as well be framed as a practice based on the **childrens perspectives and kindergarten traditions.**
-

Drawing on the Didaktik tradition

- In the crèche I question images of the needy, lacking child alongside images of 'normal development'
 - Beyond normalizing techniques of developmental stages and evidence-based, best practice
 - A philosophical and political critique drawing on the Didaktik-tradition
 - Maintain and develop caring relations, meaningful, child-centered activities with engaging and stimulating content
-

For the child's benefit

- ... *maintain and develop caring relations, meaningful, child-centered activities with engaging and stimulating content*
 - **A world where universal truth is questioned, where domination and marginalization is opposed, and where dehumanising technocratic approaches to public management are contested**
-

A skills-and-testing framework

- Competences and skills defined by testable standards
 - To which degree a given child lives up to these expectations
-

Quality assurance

- The Danish Ministry of Finance
 - Tools to compare the practices/results of different day-care facilities.
 - Indicators
-

Special-, focused- or general language stimulation?



Educators are free?

- Devise their own school-readiness tick-off lists from the broad and open-ended national day-care curriculum
 - Standardized aims and simplified methods are growing on the municipality level
 - Educators are free to make concrete content
 - Utilize this freedom to create rich experiences for the youngest children in the crèche?
 - I argue for critical Didaktik in the kindergarten, as well as in the crèche.
-

A double transformation

- Educational research is linked to centralized (or strategic) agendas focused on what works through systems of grants, tender documents and applications
 - Pedagogic practice should be based on findings from educational research; findings that tell us what works within education
 - Thus pedagogy remains **free and decentralized, yet confined** within discourses of quantifiable outcomes and accountability
-

The Language Pack

- Make Danish crèches and kindergartens focus on language acquisition through research-based in-service training
 - The tender document, the Ministry of Social Affairs:
 - ”latest knowledge and research”, ”knowledge” and ”concrete tools”
 - The Consortium's application:
 - every aspect of LP will be secured through a meta-analysis review that follows international standards (for what counts as evidence) (p. 6)
 - The results from this systematic review will be converted to evidence-based knowledge (p. 13)
 - The Ministry of Social Affairs uses the broader term research based knowledge; the consortium goes the extra mile to ensure that **research-based means findings generated primarily by RCT-designs and meta-analyses**; that is, evidence-based knowledge
-

The hen and egg problem

- Practitioners request norms and evidence from research and policy which in turn inscribe the early childhood education and care-field in discourses of norms and evidence...

Conclusion

- No technical truth, whether it is an economic truth, a psychological, biological or a methodological truth, should ever be allowed to colonize the larger democratic project about **supporting early childhood education and care** in using contextualized knowledge, documentation, collaborative experimentation and curiosity to maintain and develop **caring relations, meaningful, child-centered activities with engaging and stimulating content.**
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Abstract

In this paper I discuss contemporary tensions between policy, research and practice within Danish early childhood education and care. I present a critical, but open-ended, pastiche narrative with elements of modernization, evidence-based practice and (post-) positivistic research. I draw on postmodern and post-pragmatist sources to construct this pastiche, and in doing so I focus on discourse, power and contextualized meaning. I do not keep politics out of my research (Denzin, 2006, p. 421) – I write with political intent (Mac Naughton, 2005)!

Keywords

early childhood education and care, research, policy, practice

Introduction

Denmark has a rich tradition for self- and co-determination in early childhood education and care (ECEC in the following): both educators (working in day-care facilities) and teachers are encouraged to experiment with theory and practice, and children are considered active participants. In this regard, Danish ECEC is part of the *Nordic Tradition* (OECD, 2006), even though variations exist between the Nordic countries (Einarsdottir & Wagner, 2006).

The topic of this paper is contemporary correlations between public management and educational policy in Denmark. A call for modernization of the Danish welfare state has gradually grown in power since the 1980s (Rasmussen, 2004, 2007). A growing focus on standards and optimization is one consequence for education: educators in day-care facilities must improve the way they follow up on the results of standardized language assessments (“New Initiatives,” 2010). National standards for school readiness are forthcoming from the Ministry of Social Affairs (2011a). It is speculated that significant economic gains could result from lowering the age of school start from six to five years (Lynge & Linnebjerg, 2011).

I inquire into how these dominant discourses masquerade as merely common-sense modernization or even reason and truth while they influence ECEC research and practice in the most fundamental ways.

Theory

Truth is a power relation. I write this paper from a postmodern position (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007, p. 22). Ontologically, postmodernism/poststructuralism is skeptical of claims about essential and universal truths (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008, p. 222). What is regarded as truth or common sense always serve particular interests. The answer to this is *not* relativism (Moss, Dahlberg, & Pence, 2000, p. 109) but diversity, complexity and multiple co-existing perspectives, even within research. Traditional, truth-manufacturing methods are subjected to inquiry; new methods are introduced and criticized (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Lyotard (1984, p. 277) argues that postmodernism “signifies not the end of modernism, but another relation to modernism.”

Language does not mirror an objective world; it constructs meaning and thus social reality. Ultimately language shapes one's sense of self. Meaning is produced according to the available discourses and/or allowed in a given context at a given social/historical moment. “Language as competing discourses—competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world — makes language a site of exploration and struggle” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). Thus I pursue modernization and evidence discourses in this paper.

Modernization is Accountability-policy. I draw on Rasmussen's (2004, 2007) characterization of Danish modernization processes with regards to public management. *Accountability* is understood as an approach to public management that defines *who* can be held responsible by *whom*, for *what* and with *which* consequences. Accountability policy comprises centralized aims for student outcomes. Rasmussen works with a Luhmanian perspective of complexity reduction. I draw on the critique of quality assurance and top-down policy initiatives developed by Dahlberg & Moss (2005), Moss, Dahlberg & Pence (2000) and Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (2007) to combine Rasmussen's insights with a critical postmodern perspective on policy and ECEC.

Education is a democratic practice. Biesta (2007) applies a pragmatist approach to the interrelations among research, policy, and practice, and is skeptical of claims about science as the provider of a copy of reality. Thus teaching and learning is meaning making and education is a thoroughly moral and political practice that requires continuous democratic contestation and deliberation, not positivistic concepts of effect and evidence. From a likewise (post-) pragmatist standpoint, Denzin (2010b, p. 25) notes that a key feature of social life is interpretation. Drawing on Biesta and Denzin I thus view education – along with policy, practice and research – as value laden and contestable. It should be open to democratic contestation, and thus always pushing to add “... to which ends?” whenever “what works” is articulated. .

These theoretical perspectives are established here to set the stage for critical inquiries into dominating trends within ECEC research and policy. Constructing open-ended themes and creating “smooth spaces” (Massumi, 1987, p. xiii) of experimental thought and practice (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) is an aim with intrinsic value. Moving beyond the discourses of (post-) positivism and evidence, I make a highly value-laden choice to explore alternatives to ‘what works’ in ECEC:

I can do research that aims to defend and to document what has been formed in early childhood education through our policies, training and practices. Or I can choose to explore what has been silenced or hidden and in doing this become an inventor of what might become and what could be different. In your own work as policy makers,

researchers, trainers and practitioners, you have similar choices (Mac Naughton, 2005, pp. 175-176).

This quote should be understood correctly. I do not want to tie my research to a particular political party or movement. As social research and diverse forms of inquiry are never outside the realm of social life, they are perceived as matters of meaning making and interpretation. Even the most strictly planned and executed randomized controlled trial (see later) always rests on socially constructed categories (i.e. you have to define what counts as learning in order to be able to measure learning outcomes), and it is simultaneously produced by- and producing political agendas on school effectiveness, high quality day-care etc. As Denzin (2010b, p. 23) notes, "all facts are value- and theory-laden; there is no objective truth." The researcher as a moral agent reflects these questions of power and perspective, and is thus aware of the ethical choices made as part of every inquiry. The key lesson to take from this is not that qualitative research is ethically superior to quantitative research, but that every approach to social research intersects with larger societal, moral and thus political issues.

Method

The paper is a *performance text* (Denzin, 2006, 2009). It should be approached as an inter-textual pastiche or bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), with inspiration from Alvermann (2000) and Mac Naughton's (2005, pp. 119-145) experimental approaches to analysis. I move across and between several writing styles, genres, and representational forms. Snippets of words, quotations and visual texts are treated as means of creating a dissonating chorus of multiple voices, a performance text that invites to multiple interpretations.

I borrow the dramaturgical vehicles in this paper from Denzin (2009): Arguments and points in traditional academia's writing style are in regular typeface (like this very sentence). Autoethnographical passages are indented and italicized. A short stage play towards the end is formatted accordingly and marked as a 'dramaturgical insert'. The three news fragments are paraphrased from actual content brought by various Danish media around the time of writing this paper, and are recognizable by the capitalized word 'NEWS' in the beginning of every fragment. Biblical references are indented and presented in a different font.

At this point I will warn *you*: This text is messy, and it does not conclude with stable findings or universal principles for policy and/or further research. I paraphrase Moss, Dahlberg & Pence (2000, p. 113) in stating that rather than offering a new orthodoxy, my inquiry leads to new complexities.

Though the grand narratives may be dead as ontological frames (Lyotard, 1984) they can be reorganized in the pastiche narrative and thus revitalized in new ways, as they enter into a dialogue with local/personal narratives and performative snippets.

The pastiche narrative in this paper weaves together three distinct storylines: 1) the first part of the grand deluge myth of Noah's Ark and Flood sent by God to destroy civilization as an act of divine retribution (King James version, Genesis 6:1-22); 2) the dominating discourse of quality assurance (Dahlberg et al., 2007) and Accountability (Rasmussen, 2004, 2007) (capitalized throughout the paper to mark it as a protagonist) within contemporary policy (a grand narrative of optimization in its own right); and 3) critical perspectives on trends within the intersections of research, policy and practice

(Biesta, 2007; Denzin et al., 2006). I weave in my personal experiences as an external expert on The Language Pack, which is a large-scale in-service training program that aims to bring evidence-based practices into the Danish day-care centers. The Language Pack thus serves as an empirical illustration of the theoretical discussion.

I weave the pastiche narrative out of scholars' quotes and concepts, not of empirical hypotheses and charts supporting conclusions on causality. My intention is for this paper to inspire critical thinking and contribute to a language of resistance and possibilities (Giroux & Giroux, 2006; Rhedding-Jones, 2007) beyond "what works" within policy, research and practice; thus I aim to inspire, not to prove that I am right. I experiment with an evocative approach beyond norms of realist writing which intent to show how your own position is "superior and smarter" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 343).

Dateline: 16 June 2011: I am at the in-house editor's office to collect the proofed version of this paper. He greets me with an anecdote about a frustrated academic who wrote a short story about oranges and apples to let off some steam; he even suggests a title for my paper: Sour Grapes. Then he leans over his desk to make sure I pick up his next piece of advice: "If I were you, I would seriously reconsider going public with this. I think this paper is excellent for an intellectual discussion over a glass of red wine, but it might be bad for your career" (Personal communication, 16. June, 2011, paraphrased). He means well, and he might very well be right.

A Multitude of Corrupted Flesh

Genesis 6:1 [...] men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them

In Denmark, it is customary to differentiate between crèche ["vuggestue" – meaning "cradle room"] and kindergarten ["børnehave" – meaning "garden of children"] which are often located in two separate sections of a given day-care facility. The crèche is for the youngest children (approximately between one and three years). The kindergarten is where the older children (three to six years) go. 96,6% of all children between 3-5 years attended day-care or similar municipal child-minder arrangements in the fall of 2008 (Statistics Denmark, 2009). A child is expected to make the transition to school the year he/she turns six years old.

Denmark has a strong tradition of decentralization and freedom for teachers and educators to experiment and plan as they see fit. The 1980's marked a high point so far with regards to policy being developed together with practitioners. Development projects began to multiply, and local, contextualized truths, thoughts and practices were born in great numbers, and policy was inspired by these thoughts. One example is the so-called "7-point program" of 1987, which is discussed by Rasmussen (2004, pp. 75-76). This program was initiated by the government and sponsored by the state. It was a nationwide framework for local experimenting with schools as local cultural centers. Rasmussen calls this kind of policy soft management strategies, but nevertheless the program fostered an impressive multitude of 8000+ projects of local experimentation. The results and experiences was collected and inspired a throughout revision of the Public School Act in 1993.

The project called “Children and Youth’s Active Participation in the Society” (title translated by me, see Gundelach 1996 for more details) was a politically initiated day-care development project in the same vein as the 7-point program. A number of day-care facilities participated in the project, and experimented with different ways to support children’s co-determination.

A Flood of Waters

6:12. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

6:6. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

6:7. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

A still ongoing public sector reform process, which was initiated in Denmark in the early 1980s and articulated as *modernization* (*From present day to new times*, 1986), greatly affects how the contemporary public education system is viewed. According to Rasmussen (2007) the modernization program initially focused on simpler ways to govern the public service providers, and thus on how to make a transition from governing by detailed rules (focus on process) to governing by general frameworks of expectations (focus on objectives/product)(p. 4). In the 1990s, the program evolved into the now widespread discourses of Accountability and quality assurance (p. 5). Accountability inscribes the educational system in discourses of effectiveness and quality by focusing on centrally defined outcomes. Quality emphasizes standardization of curriculum and competition within ECEC (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

* * *

NEWS: 29 April 2010. NEW INITIATIVES WILL IMPROVE CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE.

Good verbal skills are paramount if a child is to succeed in school and in life in general. That is why the government has agreed on a massive grant to help Danish crèches and kindergartens improve the ways that educators follow up on the results of the language assessments (“New Initiatives,” 2010, p. 11, paraphrased).

* * *

NEWS: 20 April 2011: THE TRANSITION BETWEEN DAY-CARE AND SCHOOL MUST BE IMPROVED.

The Minister of Social Affairs wants national standards for school readiness in order to make the school’s expectations clear to prevent that any child is left behind. The Minister states that the national day-care curriculum is a success, and it is only natural to include the proposed national standards for school readiness. (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2011a, paraphrased).

* * *

NEWS: 14 March 2011. FIVE-YEAR OLDS MUST SAVE THE FINANCES.

The Danish Chamber of Commerce claims that lowering the age of school start from six

to five years will improve the national finances by dkk 7,5 billion . . . Geert Laier Christensen, chief analyst in the Danish Chamber of Commerce, argues for the shortening of the casual childhood (Lynge & Linnebjerg, 2011, translated by author).

* * *

Within public education, Accountability means a significant interest in competences and skills defined by testable standards. Standards can be viewed as society's expectations for how well the individual child profits from day-care, school, etc. Tests are introduced to determine to which degree a given child lives up to these expectations (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 85). Elsewhere, I have described this as a move towards a technocratic "skills-and-testing framework" (Jensen, Broström, & Hansen, 2010, p. 252). The educator or teacher is accountable for delivering quality care and teaching, i.e. behavior that helps the child meet the expected standards. Hatch (2002, p. 461) reminds us that teaching young children is fundamentally different from industrial production "according to a set of profit-driven standards". Day-care facilities and schools are not corporations out to beat the competition, just as teachers and educators are not 'blue suits' who "either meet corporate quotas or are fired" (p. 461). Giroux and Giroux (2006) find these discourses to be neo-conservative "[f]ree market fundamentalism" (p. 22).

Accountability is in search for better, cheaper and more effective ways for ECEC-institutions to contribute to giving Denmark the competitive edge on the free markets of the globalized capitalism.

The Danish Government wants to deploy quality assurance in ECEC. Focus must be on "quality" and the "documentation of results" (Ministry of Finance, 2009, p. 2). Seven tools have been developed through a developmental project approach - and these tools are made to measure quality. Some of the tools concern practices in a given day-care facility, and others are used to compare the practices/results of different day-care facilities. The tools have indicators that define what counts as quality.

The quality assurance tools have yet to be implemented, by it is stated that they will function as sources of inspiration for local practice. But from the year 2011 onward, it is mandatory for the municipalities to provide information about quality and quality assurance - to present their ECEC-results for the potential customers (parents and municipality officials), so to speak

Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (2007, pp. 4-6) argue that such attempts to use indicators and predefined tools to gauge quality silences subjective, value-based and contextual truths and understandings.

The development of normalizing standards and practices is not solely a matter of policy; the ECEC-practitioners request empirically based knowledge and norm-based descriptions for their work with language acquisition (Bleses, Vach, Wehberg, Faber, & Madsen, 2007, p. 9). Practice is flooded with norm-based certainties.

Even though standardized aims and simplified methods are gaining strength on the municipal level (Broström, 2009, p. 4), it is important to clarify that the current Danish ECEC sector, with regards to practice and policy, is nowhere nearly as standardized as is the case in the US and other countries inscribed in the standards-based "readiness for school" model identified by OECD (2006, p. 63). I agree with the observation that "outdoor discovery play and wide choice of activities" (OECD, 2006, p. 62) are current features of Nordic ECEC-practices, including Denmark. As Broström (2006) notes, Danish educators are free to make concrete content out of the broad curriculum themes.

This seems about to change as the Minister of Social Affairs collaborates with the Minister of Educational Affairs on a reform initiative that introduces national standards that each child must comply with in order to be deemed ready for school (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2011).

In the day-care facilities, the educators are responsible for pointing out which children are at risk with regards to language acquisition (Bleses, Højen, Jørgensen, Jensen, & Vach, 2010, p. 5; The Day-care Facilities Act, 2011). It is estimated that 25% of all children will undergo a language assessment (Center for Child Language, 2010). This assessment will categorize the child as in need of a special, a focused or a general language stimulation practice (Bleses et al., 2007).

To sum up: the curriculum stays broad and open-ended but the language assessments add a subtle layer of output measurements. The Accountability discourse deploys standards and other quality assurance technologies against the perceived decadence and degeneration of the pre-modernized (pre-globalized) welfare state. From a neoliberal position, the aim is trimming the public sector into a "minimal state" (Fogh Rasmussen, 1993). From a Luhmanian position, the aim is reducing complexity (Rasmussen, 2004, 2007). Across the middle of the political spectrum the aim is taming the growing demands and expectations of the public, together with ensuring a responsible approach to the state's finances. It is now more or less a mainstream political project to produce the birth of Denmark as a competitive economy on the global market. As five year olds must save the finances (Lynge & Linnebjerg, 2011), the lived life in the crèche and the kindergarten has less and less intrinsic value. Educators, children, teachers and parents are bound together as producers and consumers by suprapersonal connections of outcomes, performance and "quality" (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007), as the search for high quality day-care practices (Nielsen & Christoffersen, 2009; Ministry of Social Affairs, 2011b) is on.

An Ark

6:13-16. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me [...] I will destroy [the earth]. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

6:22. Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

6:17. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

Dahlberg & Moss (2005, p. 129) use *major politics* to refer to traditional top-down policy initiatives that aim to shape/change pedagogic practice. Major politics are concerned with provision, the workforce, conditions and formal expectations regarding

pedagogic practices and institutions, quality assurance and other management technologies.

Major politics creates educational reforms that impact "the surface structures and institutional parameters" (Dumont & Istance, 2010, p. 26) and affect the "visible and relatively easy to change" (p. 26). Below this surface of schools and other educational settings there is an important dynamic layer of everyday practice, values and beliefs. This layer is harder to reach by Accountability major politics reforms that tend to view it as a "black box" (Dumont & Istance, 2010, p. 26; Rasmussen, 2007, p. 6). According to Dumont and Istance (2010), the inability of major politics school reform to directly influence the practice layer's subtle dynamics makes it unlikely that major politics reforms alone "form a convincing basis for profound change" (p. 20).

To avoid misunderstanding I want to emphasize that I do not view major politics as 'evil', instrumentalist or alienating *per se*, and I concur with Press & Skattebol (2007) "there must also be a place for envisioning a positive/active engagement of government in the arena of early childhood" (p. 183).

Even though experimentation can never be a product of direct legislation, major politics can play a vital role in securing societal and economic frameworks, which support and foster experimentation that grow from below (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 187). One concrete example of major politics as a framework for experimentation is the so-called 7-point program mentioned earlier in this paper.

Accountability employs major politics to create policy that enhance uniformity. It views change in a cost/benefit perspective. Implementation takes the form of general, mandatory guidelines for practice (developed by experts and consultants), combined with large-scale "programmes of training" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 184).

Add to this the more subtle governmentality-perspective: The truths and 'evidence' derived from experts and/or 'objective' research - brought in to back up policy initiatives - constitutes powerful regimes of truth (Mac Naughton, 2005) in their own right. From within a truth regime a complex of values, concepts, beliefs and practices are conceived of as common sense. There is nothing so powerful as common sense!

The Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) research design is medicine's method *par excellence* to test the effects of an experimental treatment (Denzin, 2010; Howe, 2004). In ECEC RCT could involve: a number of randomly chosen - but comparable - children are participating. First, the participants are screened for an isolated quantifiable variable, i.e. vocabulary. Then some of the children are left to proceed as they would anyway - they are the control group. The rest undergo a period of specialized pedagogical activities believed to enhance vocabulary - these children are the experimental group (the pedagogical activities are then viewed as medicine's experimental treatment). The ideal is that the experimental treatment is the only difference between the two groups (the 'C' in RCT). When the experiment ends, the participating children are screened again, and it will be possible to see whether the experimental treatment had a positive effect, that is, whether the children from the experimental group do better than the children in the control group. If the design meets positivistic criteria for validity and reliability, the findings count as evidence with regards to what works within language acquisition practices. Denzin (2010) notes that this particular form of knowledge, connected to (post-) positivist experimental designs, is becoming the golden standard for research as we move into the next decade of educational research.

Inspired by Kampmann (2003, pp. 88-89), I will argue that paradigm hegemony within

ECEC-research can stem from any combination of 1) scientific superiority (whatever this is); and 2) from being in sync with the dominating approach to public management at a given historical moment. Research and politics are not two separate dimensions. What counts as golden research standards and evidence (what counts as truth) are important political and public matters.

According to Denzin, Lincoln & Giardina (2006), a (post-) positivistic, evidence producing research paradigm connected to neo-liberal/conservative policy agenda within public management, has been growing in strength for two decades now. Questioning evidence-based research is easily framed as questioning TRUTH and REASON. Quantitative or experimentalist designs are becoming the *only* forms of scientific rigor, creating a hostile environment for qualitative research not on a strict analytical and/or causality-exploring path.

Holm (2011a) very timely illustrates both the research/policy entanglements and the hostility towards qualitative research. As a member of a politically appointed taskforce to improve Danish day-care centers (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2011b), he gives a presentation on effects of early intervention. Citing a range of meta-reviews of ECEC-research done by The Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research at Aarhus University, he divides research into two categories, marked by a happy and an angry smiley respectively. Action research and case studies are among those unwanted designs that get an angry smiley, while RCT-designs and quasi-experiments get the happy one.

What happens to research outside the realist domains of "explicit chains of reasoning" and outside a general interest in generalizability (Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research, 2006, p. 12)? What happens to research that does not easily lend itself to "a sophisticated empiricist reading" (Cherryholmes, 1993, p. 1) where focus is on generalizations backed by empirical support and tied to images of evidence and causal hypotheses?

Biesta (2007) argues that the concept of evidence and the discourse of evidence-based practice transform educational research and practice. A *double transformation* (p. 2) is underway: Educational research is less and less left to the opinion of the researcher, and increasingly linked to centralized (or *strategic*) agendas focused on *what works* through systems of grants, tender documents and applications. This is directly tied to what Dahlberg & Moss (2005) describes as major politics.

As research changes, so does practice. Pedagogic practice should no longer be left to the opinion of the educator/teacher (individuals or groups), but should be based on findings from educational research; findings that tell us what works within education (Biesta, 2007).

The researcher is governed/governing him/herself in relation to (post-) positivist norms of causality, effect, and randomized controlled trials, while the educator/teacher is governed/governing him/herself in relation to findings from research claiming evidence of what works. Thus pedagogy remains free and decentralized, yet confined within discourses of quantifiable outcomes.

There seems to be practices of connecting grants for research tightly to policy initiatives, thus making policy define research (define *what* to look for, and thus indirectly *how* to look for it). Research defines pedagogic practice through the notion of best practice. Working with "what works" means working with someone else's (central agenda's) goals - a cornerstone of major politics (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

The Language Pack

A contemporary Danish ECEC-example of major politics inscribed with evidence is the so-called Language Pack (LP). LP is the result of a massive government grant to make Danish crèches and kindergartens focus on language acquisition ("New Initiatives," 2010; Ministry of Social Affairs, 2010). Dkk. 34.500.000 (\$ 6.600.000) were granted primarily for in-service training (remember the connection between major politics and in-service training made by Dahlberg & Moss (2005, p. 184)).

Dateline: 18 January 2011: My early morning train cuts through an endlessness of winter-muted farmlands, taking me to the first meeting on the Language Pack's board of experts. They invited my PhD supervisor, but he arranged for me to go instead. And here I am, on my way to one of evidence-based research's strongholds with nothing but a laptop full of postmodern critique. It is so hard for me to articulate a stable and coherent alternative to what I am about to criticize. Remembering the words of Israeli educational theorist Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, I truly feel like a lonesome witness to a cause that mainstream life perceives as ridiculous or unnecessary. A neurotic who refuses to be cured, but instead insists on curing healthy, normal/mainstream people (Gur-Ze'ev, 2003, p. 83). I apologize in advance for wasting their precious time.

Even though LP mostly concerns training, research (and what constitutes valid knowledge) plays a major role in the Ministry of Social Affairs' tender document (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2010). In what follows, I will first examine this document, and then I will look at the application from the consortium (The Consortium, 2011) that won the bid. All direct quotations were translated by me.

At page 12 of the tender document, the Ministry of Social Affairs describes the general aim of The Language Pack (LP). Here we find words and phrases such as "latest knowledge and research", "knowledge" and "concrete tools". It is stated that the in-service training of LP must be based on the latest knowledge and research about children's language acquisition. The LP must also define how to respond to the results of the language assessments with the best available practice.

The in-service training is aimed to give the participating educators 1) increased knowledge about children's language acquisition; 2) knowledge about how to identify a child in need of a systematic help with language acquisition; 3) concrete pedagogic tools to promote children's language abilities. (p. 12).

The tender document refers to evidence only once, in a paragraph where it is explained that LP must ensure that the educators will acquire knowledge and skills that enable them "to work systematically with evidence-based language developing activities in the day-care facilities" (p. 25).

To sum up: The Ministry for Social Affairs' tender document concerns new knowledge and research, a part of which is the ability to handle evidence-based tools and activities in the pedagogical practice.

Now, let me turn to the successful application: A consortium consisting of University College Capital (UCC), University College VIA (VIA), University College Lillebælt (UCL), The Center for Child Language at University of Southern Denmark and The Center for Public Competence Development (COK) produced the application that was chosen by the Ministry of Social Affairs, and thus this consortium is now responsible for delivering the requested in-service training program.

The consortium's (2011) application states that the research base of *every aspect* of LP will be secured through a meta-analysis research review that follows international standards (for what counts as evidence) (p. 6). The results from this systematic review will be converted to evidence-based knowledge methods and tools relevant in a Danish day-care context (p. 13). The consortium considers quality and the request for research-based in-service training based on the concept of evidence. The Ministry of Social Affairs wants research based knowledge; the consortium goes the extra mile to ensure that research-based means findings generated primarily by RCT-designs and meta-analyses; that is, evidence-based knowledge.

I have already mentioned that at least some ECEC-practitioners request empirically based knowledge and norm based descriptions to work with language acquisition (Bleses et al., 2007, p. 9). Let us, for a moment, consider the situation in terms of the hen and egg problem: practitioners request norms and evidence from research and policy which in turn inscribe the ECEC-field in discourses of norms and evidence...

Dateline: 21 April 2011: Dear Tina. Thank you for your mail and for inviting me to another meeting on the board of experts. I have thought things over, and have decided to respectfully decline . . . I fundamentally disagree with the Language Pack's evidence and concept-like underlying basis . . . I wish you and your colleagues well with regards to the continuing work on the project. Maybe our roads will cross again in the future. Best regards, Anders. (Excerpts from original mail correspondence - translated by the author).

Epilogue: Hot Words

6:8. Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

6:18. [...] with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

Dramaturgical insert: Hot Words.

The scene is set in a conference room where representatives from the Danish Council for Strategic Research (2011) spend the afternoon introducing would-be grant applicants to the expectations and procedures.

Chair: What is strategic research? I'll give you an example: Why are so many Danish adolescent boys so poor readers? (Siggaard Jensen, 2011, paraphrased).

Professor (got a grant last year): Be aware of what is hot! HOT WORDS (Holm, 2011b, paraphrased).

Audience: . . .

Professor: Put these words in your application: RCT-design, twin study, causality, evidence (Holm, 2011b, paraphrased)

Professor: Submit to the covenant. Scrub the floor! (Dylan, 2000, paraphrased; Genesis, 6:18, paraphrased).

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