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Choosing the right kindergarten: Parents' reasoning about their ECEC choices in the context of the diversification of ECEC programs[1]

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Abstract: The sphere of early childhood education care (ECEC) in the Czech Republic has diversified enormously in the last decade. The article describes this diversification process and, drawing on focus group data, analyses parents' choices within this diversified realm. Based on the parents' selection criteria (significantly influenced by constraints and opportunities relating to social background or family status), it identifies four parental groups: pedagogical approach-centered, child-centered, facility-centered and (constrained) non-selective. The issues of ECEC diversification and parental choice are then discussed in light of Annette Lareau's classed cultural logics of child rearing and the potential implications for the reproduction and reinforcement of social inequalities.

Key words: early childhood education and care, choice, social reproduction, social inequalities, the Czech Republic.

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Introduction

Drawing on focus groups with parents using early childhood education and care (ECEC) facilities, this article analyzes parents' reflections on their kindergarten choice.[2] Special attention is paid to the different (often implicit) parental conceptions of what is "the right" ECEC and the role of the adults and children involved in making that choice. Parents usually want the best for their children; however, their definitions of "best" differ significantly and not all parents are able to achieve what they consider best. What is more, not all parents select an ECEC facility based on their concept of what is "best for children". While some parents rely on convenience, others expend enormous energy in choosing a particular ECEC facility. The process of signing up a child to ECEC is informed by conditions such as location, availability of public transport, financial resources. It is also habitually situated and parents base their assessments of the quality of education and care provided by a particular facility on different conceptions of children's needs and the most appropriate approach to them.

In Czechia, the issue of parental choice has gained in importance due to the current diversification of education options. Over the last decade, two key trends have been important in shaping the Czech ECEC system and have led to an unprecedented range of ECEC services on offer.

Firstly, the 2004 school reform provided the head teachers of public kindergartens (for children aged 3-6) with the considerable autonomy to create their own education programs as part of the compulsory central Framework Education Program for Preschool Education. This enabled the internal diversification of the public ECEC system.

Secondly, the significant increase in the birth rate was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in the number of public kindergarten places, but was addressed by encouraging the establishment of private services and hence support for a market based solution.

As a result, there has been diversification in access to care, educational content and the provision of activities, especially in metropolitan areas. As this context determines the limits of parental choice, in the first part of our

[2] We use the terms early childhood education and care (ECEC) facility and kindergarten interchangeably to mean facilities where education and care is provided on a regular basis to children who have not yet reached school age (6 years).

analysis we will describe the current state and extent of diversification. Our analysis is based on data on ECEC demand, admission procedures, fees and education programs at private and public preschool facilities.

Recent studies have shown that unequal opportunities to secure the most desirable option and the range of educational options at various levels of the system have led to stratifying effects (Ball, 2003; Vincent & Ball, 2006). It has also been argued that stratification in education begins at the preschool level (Entwisle &Alexander, 1993) and that the education and care provided has a significant early impact on a child's life opportunities (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov, 1994; Ramey & Ramey, 2004). In this article, we refer to a long tradition of research and theories stressing the fact that education systems and institutions enable the reproduction of social inequalities (see Bernstein, 1975; Blau & Duncan, 1967; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Collins, 1979; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Lipset & Zetterberg, 1959; Willis, 1977). We focus our analysis on parents' conceptions of children's needs and their perception of what is "the right" choice. We discuss the class dimensions of the emerging patterns and what they mean in relation to the current diversification of preschool education. In doing so, we turn our attention to an issue which has not been widely considered in the Czech Republic: the potential reinforcement of social divisions through the increasing need for parental choices and strategies within the diversifying public/private (market) system of preschool education and care.

Methodology

The analysis draws on three different types of data: 1) statistics on the number of applications and available places in public kindergartens in Brno from an official website www.zapisdoms.brno.cz, 2) a telephone survey of private ECEC facilities in Brno (May 2016) ascertaining the various pedagogical approaches, facility capacity and prices and 3) four focus-group interviews with parents from different social backgrounds (conducted in 2016) who had a child attending a public or private ECEC facility.

Focus groups bring together a group of people who share a common experience and common background on a given issue (e.g. Gamson, 2002; Myers, 1998; Wilkinson 1998), which in our case was the experience of choosing an ECEC facility in Brno. The quasi-natural social situation of conversing with people who have a similar experience stimulates spontaneous comments and reduces the interviewee tendency to respond to the anticipated expectations of the interviewer.

Table 1 List of focus group participants

name of parent	ECEC (and trajectory)	No. of children (in ECEC)	level of education	profession	subjective social class
Alena	private (waiting for a public place)	1 (1)	doctoral	researcher	lower-middle class
Alice	private (waiting for a particular public place)	2 (2)	doctoral	academic	lower-middle class
Anna	private (trying to find another ideal one)	2 (1)	master's	lawyer	did not respond
Antonín	private	2 (2)	master's	analyst	upper-middle class
Bára	public	2 (1)	master's	psycholo-gist	did not respond
Beata	public	3 (1)	master's	project manager	lower-middle class
Bert	public (waiting for a private place)	2 (2)	master's	technolo-gist	upper-middle class
Běta	public (waiting for a particular public place)	1 (1)	master's	sales assi-stant	lower-middle class
Cecílie	public	3 (2)	master's	lawyer	lower-middle class
Celestina	private	2 (1)	master's	interna-tional customer support	lower-middle class
Clara	private (now switching to public)	1 (1)	doctoral	academic	upper-middle class

Dana	public	2 (1)	lower secondary education	cleaner	lower-middle class
Daisy	public	1 (1)	secondary education	product manager	lower-middle class
Darina	public	1 (1)	secondary education	admin-istrative worker	lower-middle class
Dominika	public (switching to another public facility)	2 (1)	master's	head of social services	lower-middle class

In the following section, we draw on these data sources to examine the diversification of ECEC facilities over the last few years. We also look at the implications for parents choosing an ECEC facility and consider their selection process in light of their different ideas about ECEC and their children's needs, especially regarding the relationship between the ECEC institution, the teachers and the children attending. Finally, we discuss the potential implications of the patterns identified for the reproduction and reinforcement of social inequalities.

Local Context and Theoretical Framework

Under the state socialist regime in Czechoslovakia, public care and education was provided to the vast majority of children aged 3 years and older. This continued once the regime fell in 1989. In the 1990s, there was a large fall in the annual birth rate (Sobotka et al., 2008), which led, together with the extended paid parental leave, to the closure of a number of public facilities. Although the birth rate began increasing in the early 2000s (Sobotka et al., 2008), the capacity of public childcare facilities has not risen correspondingly.

At the time of our focus group interviews, municipalities were obliged to provide places for children reaching the obligatory school age the following year, but provision of places for younger children was subject to the municipality's discretion. For example, in 2009 to 2012, Brno municipality's aim was to provide places for all children aged 4-6 years, but only for about 10-

20% of 3-year-olds (OŠMT 2010). Hence, preference is given to children of preschool age. According to the municipality's data, approximately 38% of applications were not accepted in 2016 (Mateřské školy Brno, 2016).

For parents, the threshold of 3 years of age is parental leave. Until the child reaches 3 years of age, employers are obliged to offer parents returning to work a position corresponding to their qualifications. Thus, parents make greater efforts to find a place for their child as the threshold nears.

The current capacity limits are being compensated for by the establishment of private facilities.[3] The first private institutions began to emerge after the fall of the socialist regime in 1989, but it is only recently that they have started to expand. In Brno, as our data from the telephone interviews indicate, more than half (approximately 55%) of the current private ECEC facilities have been established during the last five years.[4] While the public system provides care that is widely financially accessible, the services offered by the private facilities are unaffordable for a high proportion of the population (more detailed data will be discussed below). Besides this stratification related to access, the diversification also concerns the quality of the education and care. Apart from the conventional markers of quality such as child-to-carer ratios, staff training or facilities available, the institutions differ substantially in style, ethos and pedagogy. While most public kindergartens do not explicitly characterize themselves in terms of their pedagogical approaches, many of the private kindergartens do.

Parents have different notions of quality (in the broadest meaning of the term) and their views are partially shaped by their structural location, among other things. As Vincent and Ball (2006) show, besides the organization of the setting, the structure of the day and the activities provided, middle-class parents pay attention to pedagogical style and ethos (more than working-class parents do). Vincent and Ball follow Bernstein (2004), who argues that even different middle-class fractions have different preferences for particular pedagogies. As Streib (2008) notes, we can also conceive of a "class dimension" in the pedagogies and practices of various childcare institutions. She uses the concept of the "hidden curriculum" in this relation and suggests that different institutions lead children to internalize differential values, attitudes, skills and images of who they might become.

[3] In the Czech Republic, other possible solutions such as regular individual paid care are not frequent.

[4] These facilities are established either within the framework of the two types of trades related to childcare, or, in the case of non-profit facilities, as "Childcare Groups".

As Ball (2003) and Vincent and Ball (2006) show, the diversification of education options at various levels of the system and the choice available encourage middle-class parents to place their children in what are considered the most exclusive educational institutions. While it is atypical for working-class parents to engage intensively in choosing a preschool place[5], middle-class parents tend to show personal initiative, as Ball (2003) notes. They exhibit confidence in their contact with educational institutions (being in a position of advantage), but at the same time, education choices involve a great deal of uncertainty for them. This uncertainty, or even anxiety, is related to the perceived importance of education for their children's future. To ensure their child's success, and to maintain or shift the borders of class, middle-class parents deploy various forms of capital and family resources (see also Reay, 2000; Vincent & Ball, 2001).

The idea that class-based parental perceptions of the role formal education plays in children's lives and of the dissimilar ways in which groups with a different socioeconomic status relate to educational institutions can be further developed through the findings of Annette Lareau (2011). This is despite the fact her observations concentrated on families with children already attending school (9 and 10 year olds). Lareau, focusing on the more general perspective of class differences in childrearing, identified two distinct "cultural logics" structuring the organization of daily life, language use, and interactions between families and institutions. She argued that middle-class parents engage in a process of "concerted cultivation", whereas their working-class counterparts view a child's development as akin to "natural growth". The logic of the former emphasizes the importance of deliberately stimulating the child's development and fostering their cognitive and social skills. This means that parents bear responsibility for developing their children's educational interests and that they play an active role in their schooling, looking for the best solutions. In practice, this often means that middle-class children have less control over their time and how they spend it. Working class parents, by contrast, act on the assumption that their child's development occurs spontaneously. Hence, they see no need for deliberate stimulation and strategic support. Their main focus is on providing their children with sufficient comfort and so accept the existing and available solutions to education and care. For the children, this often means having more control over their free time and how they spend it.

[5] This relative inactivity may reflect the limited scope of options available to them, as well as habitual dispositions related to their socio-economic background.

It is therefore not only the parents' preference for a certain childcare facility or specific pedagogy, but also the underlying conceptualization of the children's needs and child and adult roles in childrearing and care which potentially shape their ideas on early childhood education and care. Each of these aspects seems to be embedded in the parent's habitual dispositions which reflect their socio-economic background.

The Growing Differences in Programs and Services

The diversification has followed two main lines. On the one hand, within the system there is differentiation in the pedagogical approaches and in the programs, with the number of private ECEC facilities promoting a distinctive pedagogical approach increasing substantially examples are Montessori or Waldorf pedagogy and forest kindergartens. On the other hand, there is a growing group of private facilities offering "unlabeled" early childhood education and care. The education and care program they provide is basically related to the Framework Education Program for Preschool Education (which guides public kindergartens) and is enhanced through additional activities such as early language training, specific talent support, special sports activities, handicrafts, music, and so on. In some cases, the distinctions between these two groups are rather blurred as some of these facilities also include elements of distinctive pedagogical approaches in their programs (e.g. Montessori materials), although they do not use them systematically. Table 2 provides an overview of the quantitative diversification in Brno.

Table 2 Quantitative diversification of ECEC facilities in Brno

	Number of facilities	**Available places per day**	**Age group accepted**	**Costs – CZK monthly full-time fee (without meals)**
Public facilities	136	11,407	3 (2.5)-7	300-800
Private facilities	109	approx. 2,600	0.5-7	1,000-17,800
Montessori facilities	11	approx. 200	1-7	1,300-9,240
Forest kindergartens	6	128	3-7	4,000-6,000

These pedagogical approaches have become more prominent in the diversification process and differ in important ways in the key ECEC ideas they represent. A central difference is the way in which they conceptualize children's play and development, as well as the role of children and adults in ECEC. Both Montessori facilities and forest kindergartens with a Waldorf-inspired pedagogical program place great emphasis on supporting children

in their free and self-initiated development. Both approaches presume that children have an innate capacity to learn and to educate themselves within an environment that allows them to work independently. Hence they allow for a high degree of play directed and initiated by the children themselves. Within this, the role of the adult is to carefully guide and observe the child's developments and needs and to react to them accordingly (Miller & Pound, 2011, 74-80, 88-92, 138-142).

The unlabeled ECEC facilities in Brno are very heterogeneous and employ elements from a wide range of different pedagogical approaches, but they do not use them as a "label". Instead they promote additional services and activities such as early language training, special sports activities, handicrafts, music, specific talent support and brain-efficiency training. The most frequently provided type of skills training, offered by half the private ECEC facilities in Brno for all age groups, is basic foreign language skills (English is most important and dominates). The fees charged by these facilities (for full-time care, 5 days a week, 8 hours a day) differ substantially and range from 3,500 CZK to 17,800 CZK per month, depending on the form of language course offered. The costliest facilities are those where the whole program is provided in English. The majority of facilities offer "English lessons" on a regular basis (e.g. once or several times a week), taught both by native and non-native speakers (e.g. English language students). This activity is usually not presented as being related to a specific ECEC approach, but there is a presumption that such early stimulation supports the further development of the child's abilities.

The variety of ECEC institutions present parents with a wide range of possibilities from which to choose a facility that corresponds to their own perceptions and ideas as well as to their organizational needs (e.g. the age of the child to be cared for, opening hours, etc.). At the same time, the range of (market-based) choices that is actually available to parents is highly dependent on their views of the ECEC system and on their having the opportunity and need to choose. Other factors include the willingness and ability to research the existing options (there is currently no central register of private facilities in Brno) and to evaluate them according to their quality criteria (as private ECEC facilities may function within different legislative frameworks which pay little attention to the quality of provided care). Furthermore, some of the facilities with a distinctive pedagogical approach expect families to educate their children at home using the same approach (Montessori, Waldorf) and use this in their selection criteria as they have limited places. Additionally, the fees may limit the choices available. Hence to fully utilize the

range of private facilities, parents have to make use of their cultural and financial capital.

These aspects are usually seen as typical of the private ECEC market, and private diversification is therefore often associated with exclusivity and unequal access. Public facilities, on the other hand, differ. Nonetheless, our data on the number of applications to and places offered by public kindergartens in Brno suggest that variety also exists within the public system. The number of applications per public kindergarten place differs substantially in Brno, ranging from two to ten applications per place. This suggests that there are important differences in parental perceptions of the public kindergartens and the quality of them. Public ECEC facilities are also allowed to set their own individual programs and priorities, within the common Framework Education Program for Preschool Education (emphasizing a healthy lifestyle, ecological thinking, a respectful and democratic approach towards children, etc.). In this sense, the public system – usually associated with uniformity – also offers a degree of choice that may correspond to parents' ideas about ECEC.[6] The extent to which this potential choice plays a role in the parents' selection of public ECEC has to be further explored through qualitative research methods, in this case through focus groups.

Parents' Perceptions of the ECEC System and their Choices

Our analysis draws on data from four focus groups. It suggests that the basic criteria that distinguish the various parental approaches to selecting ECEC facilities (both private and public) are the extent to which parents value and take the opportunity to choose a facility based on their ideas, and the priorities and values they attribute to early childhood education and care. The parents we interviewed not only had differing perceptions of ECEC and the adult and child roles within it and the public-private system of preschool education in the Czech Republic, but these perceptions were also important in the decision making (although external factors or limits could overshadow). We found they had different concepts of quality and related criteria for selecting the "right" ECEC facility and different strategies for successfully obtaining a place for their child, which we will discuss in the following section.

[6] The choice has been limited by the introduction of kindergarten districts in relation to the compulsory kindergarten year. We will comment on this in more detail in the conclusions of the article.

Nourishing the Child's Individuality – Valuing Needs and Potential

The first group we identified in our focus group data comprised parents who took full advantage of being able to select "their" facility. These parents familiarized themselves with the (different) pedagogical approaches and made deliberate choices in relation to the approach they perceived as best for their children. Antonín, for example, explored Montessori pedagogy for some time before he and his wife decided on an ECEC facility. They attended courses and a parent-child Montessori program with their daughter. Based on their experiences they wanted to continue with the approach and so were looking for an ECEC facility that would allow them to do that.

The facility Antonín chose adopted a respectful approach towards the children and emphasized outdoor activity. Antonín also welcomed the existence of a community of parents who became friends and helped each other, for example, with picking up the children after school. This was also promoted by the ECEC facility, which required the parents to participate in the educational meetings and to help maintain the garden and classroom.

Like Antonín, Anna was also very interested in distinctive pedagogical approaches. At the time her child attended an employer-financed facility which had a Waldorf and Montessori trained teacher. However, the family were looking for a new facility, as her son was becoming by far the oldest child in the class. She mentioned that she was "envious" of the fact Antonín's children were attending the Montessori kindergarten and that she was on the waiting list for a Waldorf facility. For her the constraint was not financial, but the high demand for ECEC facilities with particular pedagogical approaches. At the same time, it was important for her to be sure she had found the "right" kindergarten (with the appropriate pedagogical approach) before changing.

For Antonín and Anna, the facility's pedagogical approach was the main selection and quality criterion. The pedagogical approach frames and sets the relationship between the institution, teacher and child. Their choice of pedagogical approach determined both the education program and the position and role of the child and teacher within the ECEC facility (described above). Hence, they had a pedagogy-centered concept of quality and their strategy was to find a private facility which would provide such a program. While for Antonín, the choice of ECEC facility was more the result of his and his partner's engagement with the Montessori approach (they had already

met some of the teachers and passed the required courses), Anna talked about the demanding admission process to the Waldorf facility.

Similarly to Antonín and Anna, Alice, Dominika, Cecílie, Daisy, Clara and Celestina also put a lot of time and effort into finding the "right" ECEC facility and familiarized themselves with different forms of pedagogical knowledge so they could make an informed decision – for example Clara mentioned she had done extensive internet research scrutinizing the web presentations of various ECEC facilities.

While for the pedagogical approach-centered group (Antonín and Anna), the relationship between the ECEC institution, teachers and children was predefined by the pedagogical approach, this second group of respondents tended to evaluate this relationship based on a variety of ideas, priorities and values related to the provision of ECEC. The relationship between the institution, its teachers and children was a central criterion for choosing the ECEC facility and the parents had a clear idea of how the facility should be run in order to satisfy their children: Alice, Dominika and Celestina preferred a respectful approach to both parents and children, and together with the facility's atmosphere this was valued even more importantly than the facility's educational content. For example, as Celestina puts it:

> *I'm not at all interested in what kind of exercise they do, if they learn to draw or sing or play the recorder. I don't care which activities of this kind they do. I'm not concerned about English classes, nor goal-directed education. My emphasis is on the kids' well-being; I need them to look forward to being at the kindergarten.*

Cecílie, Daisy and Clara emphasized that small groups were an important prerequisite for an individual approach to children (inspired by the Montessori approach among others). Moreover, some of the parents also stressed certain values which they saw as important to the child's integration within ECEC – ecology (Dominika and Alice) as well as an integrative approach and valuing differences (Dominika and Daisy).

Hence, these parents took the opportunity to select a facility which met their own criteria, focusing especially on the way the facility related to the children and worked with them. They saw choosing an ECEC facility as a key decision which would potentially influence the well-being of their children and their subsequent educational path. In this sense, the parents'

concept of quality is child-centered, focusing on the relationship between the institution, teacher and child, but not related to a particular pedagogical approach.

What is especially important for this group of parents is the fact that the majority of them placed their children in a public ECEC facility or were in the process of changing to their preferred public facility. Hence, this group of parents shows how parental choice and selectivity works in relation to the public system: the parents were aiming for a place in a particular public kindergarten and were aware of the fact that the chances of getting it increased as their child grew older. Therefore they either postponed applying to the public system by finding a private bridging place (as they wished to or had to return to work) or they temporarily accepted a public place which did not fully meet their expectations. As for example, stated by Alice:

> *Our younger daughter was not 3 in September. She was born in November therefore she could not get into a public kindergarten. And I have to admit that we really wanted the same public kindergarten as where our older one is. And we decided to wait for that kindergarten, and so we were looking for a private facility and our criteria were how much it was and how far away it was.*

To sum up, these first two groups of respondents with a pedagogical or a child-centered approach to ECEC, focused on finding the public or private ECEC facility which best fit their child's individuality and ideally promised to value their children's needs and potential. To achieve this, they sought the pedagogical knowledge that would enable them to make an informed choice, focusing on the relationship between the ECEC institution, teacher and child. In the next section, we present two groups of respondents who were concerned with more tangible and practical criteria when choosing their ECEC facility.

Staying within the Mainstream and Fitting into the System

Another group of parents also put time and effort into finding an appropriate facility and applying a set of criteria to guide their choice. However, their choice was not necessarily seen as influencing their children's personality and future opportunities – as the following two statements by Beata exemplify:

I was very surprised that the issue of choosing a preschool was topic no. 1 for mothers from January in the playgrounds. I didn't get it; I assumed the kids were not going to Oxford or Cambridge yet, it's just a preschool. And I treated it accordingly. I thought it will work somehow; it's not a question of the child's life and death.

I know they [the children] will have to face so many things in their lives and if we had to think they would be blocked or stopped by the preschool, we would be going mad right now. We need to rise above that and rely on the fact that the child has to get over things sometimes, even if they do not like it. It is necessary for life.

Nevertheless, this group of respondents also had specific preferences and made active choices, mainly within the public system. Their search for information was predominantly concerned with equipment or other aspects of the ECEC facility as well as practical or organizational concerns – as exemplified by the following statement by Bert:

For us, it was accessibility… And then references and the catering. In some preschools they give children sweet syrups to drink and we didn't want that. The school that is next to our house does not have a nice garden, so we put them in a farther away one that has a much bigger and nicer garden.

Similarly, other parents in this group predominantly applied a facility-centered concept of quality, concerned with equipment or other aspects of the facility (e.g. a nice garden, healthy food), the tidiness of the facility and whether it had a rich program (different sports, excursions, etc.) and practical/organizational concerns (proximity to home or the workplace). Hence, they discussed the richness of the program on offer rather than (pedagogical) ideas or values relating to how the institution and teachers should act towards the children. When they thought about the ways the ECEC facilities influence their child, they expected and agreed with a certain normalizing influence which would help the child to fit into the public (schooling) system. At the same time, specific pedagogical approaches differing from those in the (public) mainstream were seen as being exotic, which might be nice for the child, but was not sustainable in the current system or simply did not fit in with their ECEC ideas and values. As explained for example by Bára and Běta:

Bára:

I like it if a child is respected as a person; has an individualized approach. But I think a child in kindergarten is preparing for the next [stage of the] education system. Even if I wanted my child to go to a Waldorf school, there is just one in Brno, it is difficult to get there, it is far from where we live and probably at one point, unfortunately, our child will go to a normal school and I need the kindergarten to prepare him sensitively for the insensitive education system.

Běta:

These kindergartens [general public] are for the children of parents who have a normal approach to childraising. Normal, as they were raised somehow by their parents, and they apply this approach to their children, and so they do not have any special requirements.

Given these priorities, parents from this group took the opportunity to select a facility within the public system which met their criteria in much the same way as the parents in the child-centered group had. If they were aiming for a particular public school, some of them were willing to wait for it and find a bridging solution.

On this point, the last group of respondents we identified in our data stand out: parents who did not actively select a facility within the public and/or private system. The situation of these parents was partly determined by external circumstances – for example the need to return to work or organizational barriers and financial difficulties related to single motherhood. As was the case with for example Dana:

I was not looking for a kindergarten, I was looking for a place in a kindergarten. Basically, I only expected to put my child there and have a rest and be able to go back to work.

The selection process was thus mainly related to practical/organizational concerns; the central selection criteria included for example workplace proximity:

Darina:

I didn't make my choice based on references but based on my job, where I work. Where we live, there is excess demand and my boy was not three yet. So it was out of kindness that the head teacher took him with regard to the fact that I am a single mother.

This example in particular shows how external circumstances can potentially overshadow the person's ideas on ECEC selection criteria (however, when parents from this group evaluated their choices, they primarily focused on equipment and tangible quality criteria). As the following excerpt exemplifies, Darina's quality criteria are in fact facility-centered, but she presented her situation in terms of her single mother status acting as a constraint on the choices she would otherwise like to make:

> *Darina: It´s a shame they did not have someone younger, more active [teacher]. They didn't go out, no trips by public transport. Since he's been in kindergarten, he hasn't been on a tram. And they're in the center, all the activities are to hand.*
>
> *Q: Did you consider changing schools?*
>
> *Darina: No, I wouldn't have managed.*

To sum up, we found these second two groups of respondents had a facility-centered approach to ECEC that focused on finding a public ECEC facility which would best fit the parents' tangible criteria and choices related to external circumstances (returning to work, single motherhood), which were important constraints on priorities and criteria related to the parents' ideas on ECEC and its values and their priorities.

Discussion

The most important difference we have discovered so far is whether there is a relationship between the ECEC institution, teacher and child and how parents perceive and discuss its importance and potential to influence their children's personality and the development of their (intellectual) potential. We identified and described four different groups. The first two groups of parents related their choice of ECEC facility to this relationship, either within the framework of distinctive pedagogical approaches or based on their own ideals and values. They thought an equal and respectful relationship between the institution, teacher and child was central to the child's further development. While it was crucial for these groups of parents to find a facility which best fit their child's individuality, the second two groups expected their children to fit into mainstream facilities, primarily using tangible facility-centered criteria to make their choice.

Our findings seem to closely reflect Anette Lareau's (2011) distinction between two patterns of childrearing, her differentiation between "concerted cultivation" and "accomplishment of natural growth", which she understands as being significantly class-based: The first two groups of respondents had a pedagogy-centered and a child-centered approach to ECEC that resembles Lareau's concerted cultivation (practiced by middle-class parents). The accounts of these parents center around their concerns about providing their children with the best education and care solutions from an early age. High quality ECEC was related to nourishing the children's individuality, respecting their needs and hence allowing them to develop their full potential. For the parents this meant engaging with (or mostly respecting) pedagogical ideas and the ECEC market, carefully selecting the facilities and investing cultural and financial capital in obtaining their ideal solutions beyond the ECEC (public and private) mainstream.

The emphasis on accomplishment of natural growth (which Lareau finds to be typical of working-class parents) can by contrast be linked to the basic reliance on predominantly public mainstream solutions, which we saw mainly in those respondents who had a facility-centered approach to ECEC decision making. Although they also adopted a particular selection process, they did not consider the relationship between institution, teacher and child to be relevant, nor did they look for the "best" education and care solution. Instead they expected their children to learn to function within the mainstream system and described the normalizing and disciplining effects of the (pre)schooling system as appropriate and in line with their own educational approaches.

Considering Lareau, it was surprising for us to find the rhetoric of natural growth and the promotion of child-initiated play with Montessori, Waldorf and/or forest pedagogies, which were a central issue for many of the parents, whom we otherwise saw as following the logic of concerted cultivation. What differs, however, is the child's position within the framework of natural growth. At this point, Lareau's dual logics of childrearing probably become too flat to capture the subtle (discursive) nuanced meanings of accomplishment of natural growth. In Lareau's work, it is related to sharp authoritative boundaries between adults and children and their realms. While natural growth, as in the pedagogies cited, is associated with a shared space and respectful mutual engagement between adults and children. Within the logic of concerted cultivation this creates a space for children's self-initiated play and development that according to Lareau is often lacking in this logic. From this point of view our pedagogy- and child-centered respondents are not

typical advocates of concerted cultivation and their childrearing logic could be labelled something like "concerted natural growth". Our findings indicate the need to do more research in this area, to further elaborate on the extent to which Lareau's logics of childrearing are applicable to the Czech context.

An issue that seems even more puzzling is the class dimension of these logics, which is central to Lareau's argumentation. Despite the discernable connections in our data between the parental accounts, choices and social background, the situation in the Czech Republic is complicated. The class structure of Czech society was significantly reconfigured under the state socialist regime (job allocation was partly determined by political criteria, the flattened wage hierarchy and weakened relationship between job and wage, low valuation of intellectual work, etc.). Although Czech society today *is* a class society in standard terms, as Katrňák and Fučík (2010) show in their quantitative analyses scrutinizing the relevance of various class schemes in the Czech context (living standards and lifestyles are strongly correlated with a person's position in the labor market), the historical reconfiguration means we can expect a less strong relationship between a person's class and orientations.

Nevertheless, despite the cultural specificities, our data still indicate an important correspondence with Lareau's classed logics of childrearing. There is a significant overlap between the selective pedagogy-centered group and the child-centered group (which can be linked to her concerted cultivation) on the one hand and the group of parents that could be characterized as middle-class (based on education, profession and self-attribution) on the other. These approaches are adopted particularly by parents with a substantial or proportionally substantial level of cultural capital. In contrast, the parents without a university degree (or with lower secondary education) were much more strongly inclined to a facility-centered option and much less selective in their choices (their perspective was close to the accomplishment of natural growth).

The results indicate important differences in opportunities to be able to *freely choose* between diversified public and private ECEC facilities, and these stem from different perceptions of the role of ECEC in general, children's needs, the related quality of ECEC and the limited accessibility to ECEC (capacity, financial, locational). The data indicate that both points are related to the parents' socio-economic background and reinforce one another. The first two groups, who perceived the differences between the facilities to be significant and welcomed the fact they could choose, were also more

likely to be able to overcome the potential constraints (based on their available economic and/or cultural capital). Parents from the third and fourth groups expressed less concern about the differences between the facilities and were less selective and at the same time more vulnerable to external constraints and limited accessibility (depending on their situation).

Conclusion

Recent developments in the Czech Republic have led to considerable diversification in preschool education and care, especially in metropolitan areas such as Brno. The significant shortage of public facilities is accompanied by a growing sector of private providers. This provides greater opportunity for parental choice. However, whether parents can take advantage of these choices remains highly socially structured. Besides the "hard factors" limiting their choices, such as the fees, there seem to be many softer factors shaping both choice and access, such as parents' willingness and ability to research the existing options, or – in the case of kindergartens with particular pedagogical approaches – "proficiency" in the given pedagogy, and their willingness to participate in specific courses. The aim of this article was to analyze parents' narratives of choosing a kindergarten for their child. Drawing on focus groups with parents from different social backgrounds, we focused on the various conceptions the parents had of their children's needs, the role of ECEC generally and the role of the children and adults within it. We regard these conceptions as another important factor shaping parental choice.

The parents significantly differed in the extent to which they cherished and utilized the opportunity of being able to choose a kindergarten based on their ideas and priorities concerning both their children and early childhood education and care. Also their notion of quality varied noticeably; their accounts revealed different configurations of factors they thought important when making the choice. Based on these criteria, we identified four groups of parents: pedagogical approach-centered, child-centered, facility-centered and (constrained) non-selective

As our findings suggest, there is an important difference in perceptions of the child's position between the first and the second group on the one hand, and the third and the fourth group on the other. While the first and the second group of parents shared the assumption that children are malleable and they were very apprehensive about the potential risks associated with making the "wrong choice", the third and the fourth group considered chil-

dren's psychological and cognitive qualities to be more innate. They wanted their children to be happy and successful, but they did not think kindergartens had the potential to deflect children away from their "given" direction, influence their future opportunities or potentially harm their development. For them, choosing a preschool was not an issue of paramount importance.

This contrast, however simplified, can be traced back to social origin. Despite the cultural differences, it shares basic features, as we have tried to show, with Lareau's classed logics of childrearing. The pedagogy-centered and child-centered approaches to ECEC that we found mainly in parents with substantial or proportionally substantial cultural capital have similar foundations to Lareau's concerted cultivation (practiced by middle-class parents in her research). The facility-centered approach seems to share the presupposition of the "innate child" found in Lareau's accomplishment of natural growth. While she identified this parenting style in working class parents, in our case, the facility-centered approach was by no means limited to this group, nor to the group of parents without a university degree (represented more in our research), although it was typical among them.

Looking into the future, these different parental conceptions with their different views of the child's malleability and thus of the importance of (good) education have clear consequences for social reproduction. From a more general perspective, the diversification of ECEC, classed parental preferences for certain facilities and the actual possibilities open to them regarding child placement (determined by level of financial and cultural capital) seem to lead to a paradox: private and public kindergartens with "alternative pedagogies" and/or respectful approaches that could be characterized as having inclusive ideas of education and as valuing differences, in fact contribute to the widening social gap, precisely because of their social exclusivity. Due to the diversification, children are exposed from a very early stage in their lives to a rather different education experience. A few of them receive the message that they are autonomous subjects entitled to pursue their own preferences, to actively shape interactions and to treat adults as equals. In a society divided into social classes this is not a class-neutral message.

It is important to emphasize that this does not reflect the public/private division. Rather, the current lack of public kindergarten places forces those parents who are dependent on a public kindergarten place to accept what they get when they need to return to work (usually when the child is 2.5-3 years of age). As under the current system the chances of a child obtaining a place in the public kindergarten favored by the parent(s) (often influenced

by respectful approaches and pedagogies) increases as the child ages, these kindergartens are mainly available to children who have spent some time in a private facility and apply for a public place at the age of 4 or 5. The compulsory kindergarten year, which was introduced in autumn 2017, changes this situation to a certain extent, as it limits these parental strategies: from the age of 4, children from within the kindergarten district will have absolute precedence. However, in a system which does not provide public ECEC places for all 3-year olds, the prioritizing of older children and the rise in the number of children attending kindergarten probably further complicates the search for a public place for a 3-year old. And finally, the creation of kindergarten districts is highly likely to lead to further ghettoization, as the district kindergartens will copy the city's social map even more.

Since equal access to education is an education policy priority in most countries and is seen as a tool for strengthening social integration and equal opportunity (Česká školní inspekce 2014; Matějů & Straková, 2003; Rabušicová, 2013), more attention should be paid to this initial stage in the educational pathway. Although in the Czech Republic publicly funded services account for a relatively significant share of the provision, the current conditions are reinforcing social inequalities that have not been sufficiently considered. For some, the growing range of choice potentially boosts their choices, but for the rest, it is illusory.

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Critical pedagogy in practice: A case study from Kerala, India

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Abstract: Analysing teaching-practice offers an opportunity to answer questions like what is critical to making a pedagogy democratic, what are the factors that support a teacher to be critical in her teaching? Or what restricts the teacher in being critical in her work? This paper seeks to address some of these questions by presenting the findings of an investigation into the practice of teachers who are committed to the idea of critical pedagogy. The scope of the study is limited to understanding the critical aspects that are related to the teacher's work within the classroom. The paper analyses the theoretical arguments that are relevant to critical pedagogy in relation to teachers' practices as they emerged during the study. The study, conducted in the South Indian state of Kerala, reveals that teacher subjectivity and schooling situations interact in a dialectical fashion to shape the nature of classroom teaching. The political subjectivity of the teachers, shaped by their close interaction with the Kerala Science Literature Movement (KSSP) makes their pedagogy critical in nature. On the other hand, the standardized curriculum and mechanically disciplined school environment continuously challenge the teachers' efforts at being critical in their work.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, political subjectivity, teaching agency, campus culture.

The primary goal of critical pedagogy is guided by the goal of formulating educational practices that can contribute towards shaping a democratic culture with an anti-oppressive social vision in the classroom and society. The idea of critique and inquiry occupies a crucial role in such a pedagogy. Teachers are seen as *transformative intellectuals* capable of developing critical attitudes and skills among students. Following the introduction of the National Curriculum Framework–2005 (NCF–2005), which laid an overt em-

phasis on social transformation as one of the key aims of education, several state governments were encouraged to revisit the state curriculum framework in India. The Kerala Curriculum Framework–2007 (KCF–2007) was developed from NCF–2005, keeping in mind the contextual needs of the region. It suggested critical pedagogy should form the broader framework for teaching in schools. A number of teachers volunteering with the Kerala Science Literature Movement (KSSP) had an important role in campaigning for and implementing the KCF and new curriculum in the state of Kerala. The present study is an attempt to analyse the practice of two teachers – Samir and Rosa[1] – who are committed to the idea of critical pedagogy. The primary data was collected during six months of classroom observations and in-depth interviews with the two teachers. The classroom episodes, interviews and school observation are used in the final analysis. The State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) recommends critical pedagogy in its framework. As the post KCF–2007 reforms had a particular influence on the middle-school curricula in Kerala, middle school teachers were selected for the study. The researcher analysed field notes, interviews, observation, photographs and videos to examine the pedagogy. The school is observed as a space of interaction among subjects and the objective realities that exist in that space. The nature of classroom pedagogy is analysed to unravel the key factors that shape pedagogy within a context.

Educational Context of the Study

The contemporary education scenario in India is significant for the manner in which it bridges the interests of the middle class as they were consolidated during the nationalist phase with the emerging requirements of globalization. The new phase of globalization is primarily guided by the principles of the "Knowledge Economy[2]". In this paradigm, control of technical innovations and production is pivotal in patent production and the monopolization of the market. To ensure control of the market, global capital influences the nature of industrial research and technical education. New skills development programmes[3] initiated by the Indian state are indicative of

[1] Pseudonyms have been used for the participants. Samir is a government school teacher with ten years' teaching experience and has been an active volunteer with the KSSP for the last fifteen years. Rosa has been teaching in a private aided school run by Sri Ramakrishna Math for the last eight years. She is regional secretary of the KSSP and has volunteered with the movement for more than fifteen years.

[2] In the globalization era, knowledge is considered significant in the production process. The knowledge-intensive market paradigm is termed the knowledge economy, in which knowledge became the prime factor in production.

[3] The National Vocational Education Qualification Framework introduced by the MHRD

such trends. Thus, the economic character of education gained importance in globalized era. The market model not only supports privatization but also proposes that education should be an investment in human capital for economic growth. The 2000 report by Ambani and Birla confirms this: “We have to fundamentally change our mind set from seeing education as a component of social development to realizing that it is a means of creating a new information society with Knowledge, research, creativity and innovation. It is not a social expenditure but an investment in India’s future” (Ambani & Birla, 2000). Kerala has held the highest rank on the human development index in India for several years. The state education sector has a high literacy rate and enrolment. There are a number of historical factors that have contributed to Kerala’s educational achievements. The work of missionaries, initiatives by the princely states of Travancore and Cochin in the late nineteenth century and the social movements in Kerala in the early twentieth century all advanced these achievements. The backward community movements and working class, nationalist ideas and peasantry mobilization by political movements also strengthened the education process in the region.

However, the contemporary thinking being shaped in the education sector is not as hopeful as the state’s previous education visions and achievements. The education sector has always been impacted by the conflicting political visions of the two major political fronts (LDF and UDF) that have ruled the state since its inception.

The Kerala Perspective Plan–2030 (KPP), a vision document published by the UDF (United Democratic Front) government in 2013, argued for the development of competitive and tradable human capital in Kerala. The ideas of ‘human well-being’ and ‘social development’ have become ‘conventional’ for these policy makers. They firmly believe that welfare policies and education for social development are no longer important in Kerala. The end goal of education is to prepare competent ‘human capital’ for an efficient knowledge economy. There is no consideration of the complexities of third world situations and the detrimental effects of globalization on poor, marginalized people, nor of its exploitative features.

in 2012 with the support of international bodies supports different skills development programmes for higher secondary and university students across the country. The Additional Skill Acquisition Programme (ASAP) developed by the state of Kerala and the National University Student Skill Development Programme (NUSSD) initiated by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Maharashtra are examples of such initiatives.

The state is facing the serious problems of ecological degradation, gender discrimination caste issues and consumerism. Provisional data from the 2011 census indicates that the literacy rate among the Schedule Caste (SC)/ Schedule Tribe (ST) group and fishing communities is much lower than that of Other Backward Communities (OBC) and the general caste. It has been noted that SC/ST communities' social mobility is restricted by caste hierarchy and poor land holdings and educational achievements (KSSP, 2004). However, there are no suggestions that address these issues. Gender disparities are increasing in the state. Kerala has a poor female work participation rate (FWPR) compared to national standards (KSSP, 2013). The Kerala Perspective Plan overlooks all these issues. The only suggested solution for developing the state is to work towards a strong knowledge economy. Education is considered merely as a tool to achieve this goal. In 2005, with the support of UNESCO and NCERT, Kerala SCERT under the Left Democratic Front (LDF) formed government hosted an international workshop on critical education. Prof. Michael W. Apple visited Kerala and gave the KSSP unconditional rights to publish his book *Democratic Schools* in Malayalam. By this time NCERT had formulated the 2005 National Curriculum Framework. The idea of critical pedagogy was starting to be used in the context of Kerala's education. The idea was explicitly used during the implementation of the 2007 Kerala Curricular Framework.

The KCF explains the conflicting nature of knowledge in society. It is said that the curriculum cannot avoid these issues. The KCF lamented the dominant social structures and 'development' thinking in our society. It recommended critical knowledge should be part of the school curriculum. It was explicit on the politics of education:

> Globalization and commercialization too have weakened the gains attained earlier...Disappearance of agricultural and traditional trading practices is also seen. Corruption, aggressive tendencies, rates of suicide, communalism and superstition have multiplied manifold. At this point, the question of what the content of curriculum should be gains the ground. (SCERT, 2007)

KCF–2007 led to a rewriting of the school textbooks used in the state, based on local government (Panchayat) consultations and the identification of themes for curriculum development. Using critical pedagogy as the anchoring philosophy of the curriculum was a radical initiative. Education was explained as a process of creation and transformation. Thus, KCF–2007 proposed that critical pedagogy should be anchoring idea of schooling in the

state. The LDF returned to power in the 2016 elections. The KCF–2007 suggestions are still active in state education policy.

The Role of Teaching in Social Reproduction and Transformation

Classical Marxian inquiries analysed education as a superstructure and characterized schools as institutions of social reproduction. Bowles (1977) explained the unequal schooling that contributes to the social relationship in capitalist society. In his opinion schools reproduce the educational achievements and skills that maintain the hierarchy of social relations. The continuation of the social division of labour from generation to generation is achieved through schooling. His study of the American system of schooling indicated the role of schools in supporting the existing class relationships. Willis (1977) elaborated upon the school failure is related to the class positions of the students. He observed schools as an institution for the transmission of class inequalities. In Bourdieu's (1976) opinion schools propagate middle class culture. His writing elaborated the argument that school is a conservative force that favours the privileged in society through school's 'techniques' and criteria in academic judgment. He critiqued the notion of the school as an agency distributing 'cultural capital' so as to reproduce existing social relations. Scrace (1993) observed the influence of the cultural capital of the dominant Indian class in reproducing curricula, school rules and teaching style. His study on India draws attention to the social reproduction of existing hierarchies through textbooks and pedagogy. All these arguments show that schools are social sites where the younger generation are trained in order to maintain existing social relations and values. Whenever schools are involved in social reproduction, teaching becomes a dis-empowered labour that contributes to the process of social reproduction.

The interpretation of Marx's idea of the empowering notion of labour is important in understanding the act of teaching in modern society. It has been pointed out by Marxist theorists that labour is more than an alienating activity in the capitalist mode of production. Marcuse stated that "labour can only be adequately comprehended through concrete investigations of the distinct form it takes in each mode of production. The process of labour determines the essential structure of the society and therefore, the conditions for the possibility of the realization of reason, and freedom." (Quoted by Held, 2004, p. 237). This understanding of labour provides us with an opportunity to investigate the emancipatory potential of teachers' work in

the modern world. Apple acknowledged the possibilities offered by post-modernist and post-colonialist thinking. But he did not want to romanticize the idea of agency without reflecting on the dominance of structure in the era of 'crisis' (2013, p.14). He also theorized the resistance of labour in his book *Education and Power*. As he put it, "Rather than the labour process being totally controlled by management, rather than hard and fast structures of authority and norms of punctuality and compliance, one sees a complex work culture. This very work culture provides important grounds for worker resistance, collective action, informal control of pacing and skill, and reasserting one's humanity..." (2012, p.22). Thus, he moves beyond a structural functionalist analysis of labour. He lamented the efforts to fix teacher identity and professional development without considering the challenges of social transformation.

Freire (1996) argue for a pedagogy that liberates the oppressed from the social structures of oppression. He considered pedagogy to be the ontological vocation of humanization that makes the oppressed conscious of the objective realities that restrict their freedom of life. The Freirean pedagogy facilitates 'praxis' in the life of the oppressed. He critiqued the oppressive practice of 'banking education' that treats human beings as passive depositories of information and suggested 'problem-posing' and 'thematic' inquiry to critique and uncover the oppressive conditions of life. In the process of humanization a teacher's primary task is to build solidarity with students in the process of unveiling the reality. From here, teachers and students reflect and act to recreate the reality. Taking lessons from humanizing pedagogy elaborated by Paulo Freire, scholars like Giroux (1988, 1996, 1997, and 2003); Shor (1992); McLaren (1995); Kanpol (1999) and Kincheloe (2011) theorized different dimensions of critical teaching practices in classroom. These explanations are popularly termed critical pedagogy. The primary goals of such explanations were guided by the goal of formulating educational practices that can contribute towards the development of a democratic culture in the classroom and society.

Gore (1993, 1998) critiqued the capacity of radical pedagogy discourses to alter education institutions and society and its limited contribution to the project of empowerment. She proposed that pedagogic sites should be examined through the analysis of power and knowledge in educational discourse. Gore argued

> In focusing on the aspects of the social reconstructionist tradition, my aim is not to destroy that tradition but to contribute to it by (1)

> elaborating the local functioning of regimes of critical and feminist pedagogy and the regimes of institutionalized pedagogy in social reconstructionist teacher education, and (2) identifying ways in which teacher educators alter those regimes using their own practices to arrive at suggestions. (1993, p.141).

Her interrogations into pedagogic discourse are important in understanding the hidden notions of power in pedagogies. These theoretical positions leave us with a few questions. What is the position of the teacher as a subject in critical teaching processes? Does the teacher have "agency" in her work? If so, what contributes to shaping agency in teaching? The following section elaborates upon insights obtained from an examination of the pedagogic practice of two teachers committed to the idea of critical pedagogy.

Key Factors that Shape Pedagogy in Classroom Practice

A number of factors seem to influence the teaching practices of the participants in the study. The research has found that teaching practice is shaped in real life situations, impacted by the material realities of the site of teaching. Everyday realities sanctioned by education department to the teacher are guided by the 'dominant' education interests of society. These interests are manifested through the institutional structures of teaching-learning. On the other side the teacher is the subject who anchors the teaching-learning. Her subjectivity interacts with the material realities in a schooling context to shape the classroom pedagogy. Freire's (1996) elaboration of the notion of 'radical subject' explained this dialectical interaction shaping the action. He explained the process of radicalization as begin equal to the process of liberation that humanizes the individual. He said, "Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality" (Freire, 1996, p. 19). He then continued, "A radical is never a subjectivist. For this individual the subjective aspect exists only in relation to the objective aspect (the concrete reality which is the object of analysis). Subjectivity and objectivity thus join in a dialectical unity producing knowledge in solidarity with action and vice versa." (ibid, p.20). The teaching practice of the teachers in this study is understood as dialectical interactions of the structure of schooling and the subjectivity of the participants. These factors are further explained below:

Circumstances of schooling: Campus culture and curriculum

Althusser (2008) observed that the school is the dominant 'ideological state apparatus' that functions through the ideology of the bourgeoisie state. However, he did take into account the intellectual agency of the teachers. This is evident in his references to teachers' attempts to resist the dominant ideology. In his elaboration of the concept of ideological state apparatuses, including the school, he added, "I ask pardon of these teachers who, in dreadful conditions, attempt to turn the few weapons they can find in the history and learning they 'teach' against the ideology, the system and practices in which they are trapped" (2008, p. 31). This study provides insight into the position of teachers in institutional settings. The evidence from the field clearly shows that the structure of a school has a major impact on the shaping of teaching practice. However, the study also shows that this structure is not just determined by the ideology of the state. The 'campus culture' determined by the management also plays an important role in shaping the structure of schooling. The elaboration of the campus culture observed in the study indicates the impact of the specific context of the school.

Campus culture includes the actions and nature of interactions of the subjects in the site. It also explains the accepted norms and rules in the schooling site. It can act as an element that shapes the 'teaching habitus' in the school context. The culture of the government school where Samir was teaching was lively. In the study, campus culture is identified as an important factor that shapes the circumstances of teaching. The students and teachers were free to interact and move as they wished. The students never maintained their distance from their teacher. The researcher found barely any fear of the teachers among the students. They frequently visited the staffroom and had fun with their teachers. The teachers also spent time with the students on campus.

Parents and other school stakeholders frequently visited the school premises to drop their children off and interact with the teachers. The evidence from this site shows the local community participated in improving the standard of schooling. Greater local community participation in Kerala sought to promote and strengthen public schooling (Purushothaman, 2013). There was no restriction on outsiders entering the staff room. The office room was an informal space. The teachers in the room cracked jokes and discussed classroom and personal issues with ease. During lunch time they shared food and talked about personal and official issues. From the very first day they were very accommodating and provided the researcher with a seat close

to the participant. It is evident that the school campus and teachers were not "disciplined" by the school administration.

Samir was flexible and confident enough to call the researcher into the staff room and his classroom. The evidence from the field also gives an indication of the freedom that the teacher enjoyed in making his decisions. The dynamic and child friendly culture developed in Samir's school can be observed as an initial effort to establish a democratic environment in the school. The nature of the behaviour between teachers on the one hand and parents and students on the other, and the participation of the local community in developing the campus can be identified as examples of such initiatives.

The situation in Rosa's school was quite different from that of Samir's. The students and teachers were given clear guidelines on maintaining the disciplining ethos of the school culture. No outsider was allowed to interact with teachers and students without official permission. There were no common spaces for the students and teachers to interact except in the classrooms. The school administration was strict in following the official standards. The school environment was strictly managed by a Hindu Religious Trust called Sri Ramakrishna Math. The events in the school and the movements of teachers and students were regulated by a school bell. The rules to be followed at assembly were very strict and students and teachers were expected to follow them. The students' movements during the assembly sessions followed a pattern resembling a military march. The students were to follow strict norms regarding their actions in the school compound.

There were different staff rooms for male and female teachers. The male and female teachers were found in different groups on the school compound. The male staff room was near the principal's office. All visitors to the school were asked to sit outside the principal's office. The administrative methods were focused on improving 'performance and efficiency'. The annual results are the standard for assessing the performance of the school. The rules and norms observed in Rosa's school can be considered evidence of disciplinary techniques for achieving better results in the annual tests.

Both participants used the official curriculum and textbook in their classrooms. A major part of the content prescribed in the SCERT textbook was not child friendly (neither the language nor the content). However, the participant teachers made an effort to move beyond the textbook. Samir's students were slow in grappling with the content. This made the teacher go with the pace

of learning in the classroom. A large number of children in his classes were from a working class background. He understood the diversity of students in his classroom. Nevertheless, he was not able to give individual attention to the students, especially to those children who needed more support. In the individual interactions with the researcher he was critical of the textbook and the system for restricting the poor and marginalizing students in their learning. His sessions were slow and he had fallen behind the time table.

Rosa did not have a co-operative staff room environment and schooling culture. There were clear behavioural norms in the school. The school was run by a religious trust. She talked about the difficulties she faced in sharing her thoughts and ideas with her colleagues. Her school placed repeated emphasis on the curricular achievements of the children. This can be understood as the standardization and disciplining of the schooling process. Rosa's classroom interactions were limited by these situations. She used small project work and assignments to connect the textbook content with social life outside the school. She created platforms for group work and presentations in the classroom and anchored critical discussions in her class.

Dean et al. (1987) explained the importance of analysing the impact of schooling circumstances in shaping the teachers' work. They criticized the tendency of academic writing to treat teachers as agents of middle class culture and social control without considering the circumstances of teaching. The present study shows that teaching situations are primarily shaped by the official curricular norms and practices, namely textbooks and examinations. These norms are supported by mechanical administrative practices. Disciplinary techniques are used in schools to ensure standardized textbook learning in order to produce 'good test scores'. These standards were legitimized by the school. The textbook and curricular norms can be identified as state initiated structures. But, we cannot conclude that pedagogic manifestation of curriculum and textbook is only shaped by the circumstances of schooling. The study shows that teacher subjectivity plays a crucial role in shaping the classroom pedagogy. The following section elaborates on the subjectivity of participants.

Political subjectivity of the participants

The primary nature of the subjectivity observed in the participants' teaching practices was political in nature. Political subjectivity indicates the conscious effort of the human subject to critically observe, understand and act in a socio-political context that conflicts in nature. It allows the subject to

learn and unlearn the knowledge that supports her in challenging and collectively working towards transforming the realities that restrict justice and freedom of humanity.

Samaddar's (2010) explanation of the political subject is relevant to understanding pedagogic practice:

> ...Like in any subject formation, a set of practices becomes significant in the formation of the political subject. Innovation in a new set of practices indicates the emergence of a new subject in politics who is a new author. This practice is both discursive and institutional. These practices are essentially collective, that is to say, relational (contentious on one hand, dialogic on the other), and because of this the emergence of political subjectivity is possible only in collective form. (Samaddar, 2010, xxiv-xxv)

He explained political subjectivity as the identity of practice not as the identity of self. For him political subjectivity emerges from the material realities of life. Analysing the subjectivity of a teacher as an 'identity of practice' can problematize the technocratic definitions of teaching. It also unravels the role of the 'subject' in the practice. Freire (1996) emphasized the importance of subjectivity in transforming society. He wrote, "To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naive and simplistic: a world without people...This postulates people without world. World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction" (1996, p. 33). The present study has also noted the strong impact of political subjectivity in resisting the conservative structure of schooling.

Personal communication with the participants on a range of issues that emerged during interview and informal conversations indicate that the participant's subjectivity is primarily shaped through their solidarity with the political ideology and intellectual circle of the KSSP. The following excerpts from the interview shows the political reflections on the education process.

Researcher: What is education mean to you?
Samir: The training one gets to transform the society we live in into a place with better living conditions, and to interact in it with alertness. Both for the individual and for the society that includes him, at the same time. Tomorrow should be one step better than today. A training for that should be received at an individual level also, thus it should become a tool to change the injus-

tice today…Present education system is trying to create machines. (Personal Communications, July 25, 2015)

Samir's political consciousness and thinking can also be observed in his classroom interactions. The episode described below proves his ability to bring political thinking into classroom interactions. Rosa strongly argued for teaching that considers the socio-economic background of the children.

> Rosa: The background of the students is an important issue for sure. There will be students who study well even when their social conditions are very bad. Students do have an understanding about everything, like what their house is like, what their father is, what their mother is, and all. We know such students. We give more attention to such students. When you spot such students outside the classrooms, if as you address them with affection, and inquire about the matters that concern him, like if his mom has a job now, whether his dad has a job now, what he is doing now…? Then they would be more attentive in the classes, and they would have the feeling that the teacher knows him and that she is noticing me. (Personal communication, October 13, 2015)

It is not just the textbook content that shapes the direction of the pedagogic practice of the participants in the study. Solidarity with pupils from an oppressed background and an affectionate approach that involves them in the pedagogical process is the highlight of her teaching. Knowledge about children from oppressed families informs their interactions with the neighbourhood communities and social activism. The interactions with material life situations within and outside school also have an impact on these teachers. As mentioned above, Rosa continuously engages with colleagues who follow Hindu right-wing politics and educational beliefs. She described how she dealt with such situations in her school:

> Rosa: Lot of daily newspaper approach school for giving free copies to school. When *Madhyamam* (A Malayalam daily published by Jamal at e Islami) came in, a lot of teachers here opposed it. After a few days, it was asked to move the newspaper stand from where it was. It was said that *Madhyamam* newspaper was that of Muslims. After a week, they started bringing *Janmabhoomi* (A Malayalam daily Published by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Even though a huge cry hadn't happened, those who were related to this knows. So this year, I called the people of *Madhyamam* early itself and told them that we need

> a paper here. A big event was organised within the assembly and *Madhyamam* was sponsored there. After that *Deepika* and *Mathrubhoomi* (Malayalam dailies) came. After a week itself, the sponsor of *Janmabhoomi* came and held an event in the assembly. So then everyone had this doubt whether Rosa teacher will put it up on the stand or not? The paper was brought to me, and I said, 'bring it; I'll put it up on the stand.' After 3 or 4 days, I was asked, 'teacher, today there is no *Janmabhoomi* found there.' So then I said that every paper is there. There are 59 copies of 4 papers altogether that come to the school. I am the one who distributes all these copies to each place. Then I said, 'Maash (male teacher), I am a believer of democracy. I don't think that by reading *Janmabhoomi* one will become a Hindu person, or that by reading *Madhyamam* one will become a Muslim, or that by reading *Deshabhimani* [Malayalam daily published by CPI (M)] one will become a Communist. Let the students gather all the knowledge.' I said I will put up any newspaper that comes there. (Smiling) (Personal communication, October 14, 2015)

The participants spent a lot of their time on campaigns and educational programmes organized by the KSSP. Both Samir and Rosa had a good aptitude for learning. They read a great deal and reflected on the subject that they taught and also about society in general. They understood the importance of the teacher in shaping the critical character of pedagogy. The impact of political subjectivity was quite evident in the practice of the participants in the school. The nature of their classroom pedagogy is described in the next section.

Nature of Classroom Pedagogy

The nature of teaching practice cannot be understood only by analysing 'mode of interactions' in the classroom. The underlying assumption is that knowledge is transacted and that knowledge positions (the knowledge of experience each subject has) are also important in analysing the nature of classroom pedagogy. In Freire's opinion, any critical dialogue in the classroom needs to respect the knowledge of the participants. For him dialogue starts with the "'knowledge of experience had' in order to get beyond it is not staying in that knowledge" (Freire, 2014, p.60). Both participants went beyond the content and interacted with the students by raising questions and anchoring dialogues that have the potential to promote questioning of the prescribed content. The classroom episodes described are not directed by the content of the curriculum. The teachers brought their experience

and knowledge into the classrooms to shape the political dialogue with the students.

Samir integrated student's life experiences and know-how into his pedagogy. An important aspect of his teaching is the ability to connect socio-political aspects of life to classroom discussions in an organic fashion. He used students' life experiences and language in interactions to overcome the limitations of the standardized textbooks. This encouraged the children to begin a dialogue with the teacher. The following episode portrays Samir's ability to organically incorporate political insights into his classroom interactions.

> Samir: Malayalam is our mother tongue. When I reached the classroom, what did you say?
> Students: Good morning
> Samir: Good morning. When somebody helps you, what do you say?
> Students: Thank you…
> Samir: When we do something wrong, if by mistake I hit on your leg what did we say?
> Students: Sorry
> Samir: Yes, if we ask permission to enter into the class what did we say?
> Students: May I come in…
> Samir: All these are Malayalam or what?
> Students: No…
> Samir: From where these words come?
> Students: English
> Samir: Why did we unconsciously habituate to these words? Where is the root of this?
> Student: Sayippanmaar (Sayippu is the common local dialect in Malayalam that is used to address English/white males. This word is also used to make fun of English/whites)
> Samir: Sayippanmaar ruled us for long time and they left the English here. Because they ruled, we followed them unconsciously, that is why English Medium School students wear coat and suit. We are pretending to act like Sayippu (English) by wearing coat and suit. We are trying to live like them. What is this? An English culture! Almost hundred years our place was a colony of English. Seventy years back they left. However, there is an influence of English on us.

This episode in the Malayalam language class depicts his ability to bring a critical dimension to the normalized use of English words in everyday life.

He uses the presence of English in the school and society to elaborate on the colonial impact in society. Samir uses a funny local dialect to critique the tendency of the elite, middle class Malayalis to follow the English. Students joined in his criticism in the classroom and enjoyed his jokes. There was no suggestion in the textbook or in the teacher's Malayalam handbook that the teacher should lead an interaction on the politics of language. After this classroom episode the researcher interacted with the teacher and he talked about his intentions during the pedagogic interaction:

> I talk politics in a contextual way. Yesterday a student talked about Gujarat, he described what he saw there. It is being said that Gujarat is not like that. I tell the child that there is a Gujarat that he hasn't seen. That is a political act. The political level which the child should know about is that child should be able to identify the injustice that is happening in the society in which the child him/herself is a part of. He/she should have the ability to analyse it with all the facts and queries. Utilizing the contexts from the classroom is the important part. (Personal communication, July 26, 2015)

Samir acted as an emancipatory authority in his interaction with the students. He also used his creativity and 'critical imagination' to make his classroom child-friendly. Rosa primarily followed a lecturing and interaction mode in her classroom. She positioned her teaching within the framework provided by the curriculum and the timetable drawn up by the department. She was cautious about the time frame in each session. However, there was space for the children to raise questions and doubts. Her students were attentive and reflective in the classroom. She followed a uniform pace in teaching the content and finished her content within the stipulated time. She opted to give time to students facing learning challenges, even after the classroom sessions. Rosa also used her socio-political knowledge in her teaching practice:

> Rosa: In 1990s, there was a literacy movement…To create awareness about literacy, KSSP did street-plays; they had some songs for it. It is in that; there was a song, which one? *'Enthinnathiratha, ippol thudangenam, ellaam nammal padikkenam…'* (Why fear, we will start it now, we will learn everything) (The teacher and students are singing). …….
> Rosa: ….these people were made to get a just wage. Have you noticed the strikes that are happening in Idukki and in Munnar?
> Student: Yea! Workers.
> Rosa: Ah, look at the strikes being done by the workers of tea estates

> in Munnar... so, what are they saying? They are asking for their wages to be increased. Because, they are unable to live with their current income. They don't get have a good treatment when they fall sick. They don't get education. These are the reasons they said. So in our Kerala, we could see a lot of women who work with a very low income, right?

Rosa stressed the importance of the teacher's political consciousness and elaborated on it during the interview. For her, a teacher should contribute to the social transformation. It is no different from the work of a political activist. She said:

> Teaching involves transforming students. The task being done by a political activist is that of building a good society for tomorrow. That is what a teacher is also doing. Hence teaching is a political activity. My personal opinion is that everybody should have politics. Some teachers say that they don't have any politics. Then they also have politics. Being apolitical is their politics...I usually say that teaching is a job which should be done with more political sense than any other jobs. (Personal communication, October 12, 2015)

Rosa holds a political position on her life and work. She believes that living with scientific temper[4], and the ability to critique are important characteristics of a progressive teacher. These are considered an important element in the political philosophy of the KSSP as well. Rosa considers education a tool for social mobility and empowerment.

Giroux (1997) suggested that, in transformative pedagogic practice, the teacher critiques the conservative, authoritarian practices of education. He argued for a democratic and emancipatory authority among teachers in the classroom, school and society. He opined, "The concept of emancipatory authority suggests that teachers are bearers of critical knowledge, rules and values through which they consciously articulate and problematize their relationship to each other, to students, to subject matter, and to wider community" (1997, p.103). Both participants went beyond the official curriculum to make their classrooms interactive learning spaces. This is evident in the observation that classroom pedagogy is anchored by the political subjectivity of these teachers.

[4] Scientific temper is a word used to describe the attitude of an individual to follow logic of science in life. The word is first used by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1946

Conclusion

Educational knowledge, values and relations are analysed in the context of the interplay between dominant and subordinate school cultures. The teaching practice is not shaped by the 'political beliefs' of the teachers, but by their political subjectivity that develops through their learning and experience in the course of their lives as teachers contributing to the practice. Both participants shared the formal and informal learning experiences that contributed to their political thinking during the interview[5]. For them, learning to teach is a continuous process. Thus, subjectivity cannot be articulated as a static identity. Such attempts define the subject as an object. They seldom consider the agency of teachers in their work. At the same we need to be cautious about romanticizing agency in teaching without reflecting on the circumstances of teaching.

The participants in the study continuously face challenges that are created by 'institutional norms and standards'. The schooling situations that were studied are highly standardized in nature. They are prescribed and implemented through mechanical ways. Textbooks and tests are unquestionable phenomena in schooling and teachers have no role in designing either. None of these situations are conducive to promoting critical teaching. It is true that classroom situations are highly influenced by the macro level standards set by the education system. However, the study of pedagogic episodes truly reflects the transformative potential of subjects who encounter rigid situations of schooling.

Samir and Rosa understand the political nature of teaching. They were able to critique and reflect on the guidelines that are forced upon them. Their learning and work is primarily shaped through their solidarity outside the formal schooling system; there were no official training programmes on critical education during the period of the study. The participants belonged to a community of teachers involved in critical pedagogic exercise within and outside the schools. The criticalness in their teaching is shaped through their everyday political practice and engagement with the political movement. Their expressions (through interpersonal communication and work) also indicate the elements of transformatory learning. The elements of transformation can be traced in the ability to 'critique' that is developed through their involvement in the political discourse in the people's science movement. A creative imagination and a critical rational approach guided

[5] For details of the interview, see Kareepadath (2016).

by an anti-oppressive political vision are identified as the essential character of their work.

The potential of any pedagogy to be emancipatory is embedded in its ability to be 'democratic'. Such a pedagogy recognizes the power dynamic of knowledge and its relation to the knower. The primary task here is to unravel oppressive elements. This is done through collective rational inquiries. Finally the knower becomes involved in the process of humanization. The democratic nature of pedagogy can only be analysed in its evolving nature in relation to knowledge and knower. There is a thin line between the practice of any pedagogy and indoctrination. Critical educators like Freire (2004) warn that the practice of pedagogy cannot be imposed on the learner in the classroom. A critical pedagogue should start from the 'knowledge of the learner' (contextual knowledge) and not to stick to it but move beyond to become free of the knowledge positions. Freire's (1995) elaboration of the process of humanization indicates the attention to the evolving nature of knowledge (Rata & Barrett, 2014) and its importance in pedagogic practice in developing a political consciousness. Classroom pedagogy is a goal-oriented conscious act. There is always direction in its practice and that makes it political in nature. Thus, any arguments on the 'neutral' nature of pedagogy are naive. The democratic principles underlying its practice make any pedagogic act different from the act of indoctrination.

Critical pedagogy cannot be implemented mechanically in schools. As Freire opined, it is important to re-invent the practice in an organic fashion considering both the psychological and socio-political context. It is evident that KCF–2007 has not yet achieved its vision to create schooling circumstances suited to critical teaching. The Kerala Curriculum Framework–2007 proposed a critical pedagogy as the broader framework for schooling. The policy makers handed over all the responsibilities to the teachers to fulfil the ideal of critical pedagogy. The top-down bureaucratic approach seems to weaken the vision of KCF–2007.

Batra raised the importance of 'empowering' teachers to accomplish the transformative goal envisaged by the NCF–2005. She said, "The assumption is that teacher indeed thinks the way the authors of this document have thought or else, will start doing so soon after they are 'persuaded and trained' to do so. The NCF unfortunately appears to be committed to undermine the implementation of its vision by failing to address the need to restructure the teacher education to enable the process of pedagogical empowerment of the agency of the teacher and thereby of the radical new cur-

riculum vision it presents" (2005, p. 4350). Batra's concern is about shaping and implementing the teacher education programmes that support the agency of the teacher in practicing critical teaching.

If we closely analyse critical pedagogy, it is evident that such practices cannot be institutionalized as per the bureaucratic standards of the education system in India. The present study shows that the community of teachers guided by a shared anti-oppressive political vision can contribute to the critical pedagogy movement. The critical pedagogy movement has the potential to deontologize the mechanical aspects of teaching practice. However, further investigation is required to examine the practices of teachers who are part of collectives with an anti-oppressive vision and their impact on critical education in India.

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Freedom and obedience in western education[1]

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Abstract: Education has to emphasize the characteristics which define Western democratic societies. In addition, it has to ensure the active and participative inclusion of each person in social life, where respect for human rights prevails over the person's preferred ideology. Promoting these values in citizens not only guarantees the stability of the state, but also its constant progression and improvement. Beginning at the elementary level, the promotion of students' critical spirit is recognized as a fundamental objectives. However, the structures which shape Western education in the 21st century do not allow for the development of completely autonomous thinking and critical thinking in students. In this article, we analyze the processes which comprise an education for obedience. Although obedience does not respond to conscious cognitive processes, it is present in the structural rigidity of education through the organization of the classroom. Our explanation is based on the Theory of Social Conformity, which will be presented as the antithesis of a person's individual freedom. Moreover, we will see how contaminated cognitive vicarious elements are promoted. Although they are endemic to people, they do not allow students to develop a critical spirit or to be educated for freedom.

Key words: education, obedience, freedom, social conformity, criticism.

Introduction

In this paper, we propose the idea that instead of promoting personal autonomy, formal education in the West oppresses and educates students into obedience. To understand how education is designed to achieve obedience, we start from Erich Fromm's work, analyzing the processes involved in

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learning learner conformity, which we call *contaminated vicarious learning*, *contaminated vicarious teaching* and *learnt conformity*. This is fundamental to understanding how obedience, if viewed from the perspective of conformity, originated as an element of evasion which allows human beings to integrate within their social group. However, we review subsequent work in order to complement the concepts described by Fromm. Reason begins with the questioning of rules. It is possible that once we do this, we will come to understand that many of them are necessary and convenient. It is then that we are faced with positive authority, exercised with the approval of those who subordinate to it.

What we propose here is partly the universal assumption that education is about training people whose critical capacity allows them to think and act with autonomy, since doing so is, in short, a fundamental characteristic of the citizens of a democratic, free and equal society. However, nowadays, the rigid and authoritarian structure of educational centers and the nature of the relationships established between students and teachers prevent teachers from developing a critical spirit in their students. Education is increasingly defined and understood as a place of training, rather than a temple of dialogue, critical thinking and critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2012).

It is clear that authority and discipline are fundamental components of school life (Benne, 1970; Clark, 1998, McAllister, 2017; Smith, 1985; Wilson, 1971). Studies on the subject are based on the foundations of social theory, classroom research and research on school ideology, which offer interesting perspectives on the elements which constitute authority, contexts and realities. There are of course various types of authority, such as teacher legitimacy, student consensus, and shared moral order (Pace & Hemmings, 2007). Discipline must concern students and their interest in learning activities, a sort of discipline for wisdom in life and educational interest (MacAllister, 2013).

We are not questioning the need to educate *with* discipline or *through* discipline, understood as a set of rules or norms, which when complied with consistently lead to the desired and necessary result, essential to valuable and quality learning (MacAllister, 2014); We do not propose a theory that opposes the assumption of an autonomous moral which allows for an individual dimension of education, the acceptance of universal ethical principles of coexistence and social realization; we believe that the basic pillars of training are the moral dimension and the importance of social responsibility (Campbell, 2008). We do not defend an antisystem pedagogy

either. We start from a radical democratic pedagogy (Fielding, 2007) which is centered on the individual, and opposed to market dominance. We share with Michael Fielding and Peter Moss (2011) the idea that the public school must be a social and emancipatory alternative, a school that fights against power structures that discriminate by race or class and maintain historical inequalities (Casey, 2016). We consider the traditional education structure to impede the development of the child's personal autonomy, creating discrepancies between what is learned in school and societal demands. Nevertheless, we understand that Western education systems promote obedience and authoritarianism, based mainly on the elimination of critical thinking, reflection, dialogue and civism, which leads to ideological forms of domination of an educational nature based on anti-intellectualism and civic illiteracy, making it necessary to generate new spaces in which education policy and nature can be understood (Giroux, 2017). We agree with Peter McLaren (2016) on the importance of rejecting social relations and political structures which deny the individual as a person, including authoritarianism, disciplinary boundaries and the questioning of the interrelationship between ideas and social practices.

We start from the idea that what has been described above responds to a process of social conformity, as old as the human race. However, as we will see in this paper, conformity allows people to integrate into their social group. In that process, they reject their individuality and critical capacity. Individual freedom is an isolation for which one must be prepared; otherwise, social conformity becomes a mechanism of evasion which allows us to put the demands of the collective before those of our individual self, and to discharge in it the burden of responsibility of our thoughts and actions (Fromm, 2013).

Erich Fromm and *Learnt Conformity.* Processes involved in the Assumption of Students' Conformity.

Erich Fromm, who was German and whose parents were Jewish, was forced into exile in the United States in 1934 after Hitler's rise to power. He was an outstanding member of the Frankfurt School and his ideas on authority, freedom as well as structuralism were an important turn in the sociology and pedagogy of the time.

Fromm understood democracy as a subtle version of previous authoritarian regimes. In the present era, citizens are given an opportunity to intervene in the system and this promotes a negative freedom which allows them to

think that their individuality is guaranteed by freedom of thought and expression. However, according to Fromm, freedom of expression of thought is of no use if citizens do not have their own thoughts. He relies on conformity to explain how the average citizen delegates to experts everything related to politics, economics and the general management of the country, out of fear of what the responsibility positive freedom implies. Fromm's main line of thought was initially influenced by Marxism, which was little by little turning into what he called "humanistic and democratic socialism". Thus, he criticized both the totalitarianism of the Soviet State and Western capitalism itself. This resulted in a game of labeling which had little to do with reality. Fromm has been described as a communist, social-democrat and anarchist, although his only objective was to study authoritarian tendencies in the societies of his time. Some of the tendencies he identified existed even in those democratic states where he detected a clearly hierarchical cultural pattern which was perpetuated and extended through their institutions. Ensuring students become aware and play an active part in their own learning would be a first step towards the intellectual independence discussed above.

There comes a time in people's lives when they become fully aware of their individuality with respect to the environment in where they are. This is isolation on their part and they must begin to face the problem which arises: incorporating their individual, unique and independent *self* in a society and in a group of individuals who have already established their behavioral and psychological characteristics.

Erich Fromm talks about "evasion mechanisms" (Fromm, 2013) which can be found in people who assume they have negative freedom but are not prepared to progress towards achieving positive freedom. That is, the mechanisms which help people who cannot assume the claim of their individual personality and the inclusion of that personality in their social group. Those that are not prepared to progress go back to their previous state, to a large extent rejecting their individuality to live a mechanical and compulsive life.

These evasion mechanisms are authoritarianism, destructiveness and automatic conformity. The most common mechanism of escape is that of automatic conformity. It is the third defense mechanism identified by Fromm, as well as being the most widespread. It presupposes absolute surrender in the battle between the individual *self* and the outside world, that we will adopt the customs and behavior of the majority of the people around us. Simply put, people end up imiting their environment, becoming yet another

of the many people with similar behavioral characteristics. Thus, feelings of loneliness and impotence are eliminated.

However, Fromm points out that this could conflict with the thought of individuality in the Modern Age, which is governed by freedom of thought, feeling and action.

The relation with freedom (or absence thereof) is that conformity involves accepting a system of external values and behaviors which we internalize and make ours. And there is no worse form of rejection of freedom than that; since when people obey a norm, thinking that the origin of the same is inside, the probability that they rebel against that authority is almost null, as they do not see it as such. This is what Erich Fromm (2013) called “anonymous authority”, and it takes the form of conventions, mental health, customs, fashions and so on. When an obligation is not perceived as a threat, the rejection rate is reduced to zero. Thus, the ethical responsibility of creating students is lost (Freire, 1998). Moreover, social problems, changes and critical actions are reduced to a state of total indifference – ethical, social and committed – with society and with other people.

Accordingly, conformity is the most widespread evasion mechanism, since it involves people becoming almost entirely assimilated into the customs and ideas of the social group. We will try to find the origins of this in vicarious learning, as people imitate it in their first learning experience.

This phenomenon, known as the theory of social learning, has been addressed in the work of Albert Bandura, Dorothea Ross and Sheila A. Ross (1963). Their work goes beyond previous work (by Julian B. Rotter, for example) which took into account vicarious elements, but despised the motivation.

The work of Bandura and his team gave name and form to a fact as common as humanity itself. In addition, they went further with their experiments and showed that even negative behaviors (in this case, physical aggression) can be learned. In their investigations, children imitated violent behavior previously performed by an adult where no one had condemned or punished the adult, leading them to believe that such behaviors were desirable.

Given the above, we can talk about *contaminated vicarious learning* (or better still *contaminated vicarious teaching*, because after all, it is the adults who modify their behavior, contaminating the process), when cultural as-

pects inherent to the behavioral model decisively influence all the actions they perform.

Here, we are talking about a primitive and early representation of conformity, the origins of which are found in Fromm. Solomon Asch defines it as “a psychological tendency to ‘uncritical acceptance’ of group ideas and evaluations” (1956, p. 2). Such conformity not only allows us to integrate into the group, but also to participate in it and to benefit as members. Nevertheless, this frequently requires us to suspend our personal judgment in favor of the collective judgment. We need to fit into the group to ensure our survival in it.

At this point, it becomes necessary to consider what happens when both contaminated vicarious learning and conformity merge. Assuming that the school classroom is a place of social reproduction, do we learn or do they teach us to suspend our personal judgment and leave the majority to form judgments? Can they teach us to be obedient and submissive, without questioning ourselves for external orders? And if so, is it a conscious teaching and learning process?

If so, we would venture to call it *learnt conformity*, when, in adults’ behavioral manifestations, it is inherent, and often unconscious to any kind of authority. A particular behavior exhibited, although not consciously, in the presence of children still creating their vision of the world can become determinant. The way our role models behave towards an authority will determine our conception of that authority and our attitude to it. *Learnt conformity* removes all vestiges of a person’s minimum chances to escape conformity and guarantee personal freedom and intellectual individuality.

Promotion of the Critical Spirit and Intellectual Individuality in Primary School Students

Stanley Milgram (1974) adhered to the line proposed by Fromm and pointed out that the origin of a person’s moral and intellectual freedom lay in what Fromm called *solitude*, and Milgram *isolation*. We accept the dominant value system of the socioeconomic group we are born in and grow up in. In this way, we learn to delegate the consequences of our actions to the group. Consequently, we develop an individual response, generated from our individual reasoning, which supposes isolation, a state of solitude, where individuals take responsibility for themselves in their own actions and thoughts.

As we have already pointed out, this individual freedom potentially presents a danger to the dominant culture, as it would begin to redefine itself and evolve in a progressive line. However, at present, it adapts to reproduce, extend and perpetuate itself (Escudero & Bolívar, 1994). For the system, it is much easier to use the school as a stage for social reproduction, as a multi-level screening process for dividing the students into different classes according to personal ability. However, in practice, this is carried out according to the student's socioeconomic background. That is why the school walks a delicate balance between forming student individuality and critical spirit while promoting obedience and the acceptance of vertical classes as an endemic part of the society they will belong to.

This is in line with what we have seen so far. Obedience presupposes the acceptance of external norms. In addition, these norms can come from a specific defined source, or from an "anonymous authority," as argued in Fromm (2013). For Milgram, accepting individual solitude is the beginning of freedom, or, the rejection of any of the evasion mechanisms to assume our positive freedom.

We can define obedience as a change in our thoughts and actions when some kind of pressure is exerted by an external agent (Milgram, 1974). In this definition the word *change* is important because it is key to understanding how the processes behind the origin of people's obedience are articulated. Change occurs as, under the pressure of that external agent, we change our natural behavior. At times, it may seem that the agents cause these changes to emanate from within us. However, even in these cases, the primary source of this agent is outside us, despite us having internalized it and not seeing it as an external influence.

There are innumerable dangers in acting in obedience, especially if there is a figure of authority who acts despotically and whose objective is the common good. The path between despotism and personal gain on the part of those who exercise it is very narrow. To avoid this, we must educate citizens in reason. On this, Fromm (2013) said that disobedience, as an act of freedom, is the principle of reason.

The interpersonal relationships in the school environment are small-scale reproductions of what happens in society as a whole. Thus, it is possible to discern different groups among students (defined by their racial, economic, social or even intellectual background), as well as differences in the relationships between them, and in turn, with the staff.

Regarding the concept of authority, there is a gap between the school and society. Students are taught to obey teachers, class delegates, textbooks, schedules and classroom bells, but this degree of irrational obedience would never be required of citizens in a democratic society (Ruiz, Bernal, Gil & Escámez, 2012). The reason is that a society cannot be considered a democracy if its members do not demonstrate a critical capacity before rulers.

The origins of the current education systems, as well as the dominant paradigm, must be sought in modernity, where the school is conceived as a traditional institution and as an agent of power, of the control exerted by the ruling classes (Althusser, 1977; Moral, 2009). Jürgen Habermas (1971) talks about the dominant ideology of knowledge and science, the preponderance of hierarchical knowledge which controls education and science. What is more, this ideology masks real problems and justifies the interests of the ruling class by preventing the emancipation of the dominated class. There is no neutral or innocent pedagogy, but in relation to power (Giroux, 2017).

The Western school has the modern pretension to offer a neutral, objective place where equal opportunities to all the subjects are an immutable reality. A school based on a dominant pedagogical model, which is acritical and equal. Furthermore, it is based on a scale of values claiming universality, in which a fictitious ideal of a homogeneous society is presented.

From this paradigm, learning transmits an objective and formalized content with neutrality. They are acquired with authority, imparted irremissibly by a teacher and assimilated by a student who, in most cases, remains passive, obedient and uncritical. The curriculum is privileged on the affective and the critical, and the teacher's authority is not perceived as legitimate, generating potentially destructive and problematic tensions between obedience and freedom (Hargreaves et al., 2017). We refer here to the banking concept of education where knowledge is imparted downwards hierarchically from the wise to the ignorant. Such knowledge is based on the instrumentalization of the dominant ideology and on the absolutization and alienation of ignorance where the other always takes a stand (Freire, 2014).

Many countries have found their way to democracy under the auspices of capitalism. Nevertheless, the absolute leadership which continues to show the teaching staff in the classroom has been in place since the 19th century. This disrupts student autonomy. In addition, when this oppression conflicts with social expectations and demands, internal and external personal

conflicts are often created, and these may even generate violent behavior towards other students and teachers (Barba, 2009).

There is no critical spirit in those who are obedient. Moreover, the school positively reinforces obedience, while promoting the students' intellectual independence. Here lies the great contradiction of Western education; it is a paradox which leaves unresolved the dichotomy between what education aspires to be and what it in fact is: a reproductive scenario rather than a space of personal growth and formation. From this perspective, therefore, there is no place, except verbally, for the promotion of the critical spirit in the school where citizens are formed. In addition, these citizens will be integrated into an uncritical society and surrendered to conformity. We could state that the processes which we have described above occur inevitably, due to the context in which formal education is framed. And it is possible to think that teachers' attitudes are always concerned with producing obedient students, without fomenting their critical spirit nor their intellectual independence.

But, as we have said, the education structure itself drives all the teaching and learning processes towards obedience.

Fromm discusses the concepts of negative freedom and positive freedom in relation to people's freedom and their integral formation. Negative freedom refers to the possibility of doing something in the absence of obstacles. Positive freedom, in turn, is seen as superior to the former, and refers to the ability to perform an action for the simple reason it can be done (physically and intellectually). Thus, positive freedom supposes a complement to negative freedom, as necessary as sufficient, to achieve full freedom (Fromm, 2013).

Consequently, while Western societies in the twenty-first century have achieved a negative state of freedom, where there are fewer and fewer obstacles hampering people's development, citizens are not prepared to assume their role in it through positive freedom. That is to say, a scenario is presented where citizens are offered the *freedom to* intervene in the processes guaranteeing their individual freedom in society, but they have not been sufficiently psychologically prepared to grasp the *freedom to* intervene in such processes.

Likewise, the school prepares students to know about and assume the existence of negative freedom. But they never work to promote the intellectual

independence which grants them the possibility of developing that negative freedom. In fact, the opposite is true. Students are not allowed to assume any responsibilities in school, beyond performing their tasks and sitting exams. What is more, this may be counterproductive in the sense that evaluation is part of an external entity and not one's entity.

The school structure and organization encourage all this. We cannot expect an education for freedom in a context which does not allow it. The characteristics of society today differ from those of society during modernity. However, the school system retains the structures it had two centuries ago. Although the school system's outward appearance has changed, it is still modernity that shapes the classrooms, even though education and society are constantly changing, in a liquid state (Bauman, 2005). What is more, teachers can do nothing to avoid a state of conformity and alienation developing in the students, as this is endemic to the Western education system. Its eighteenth and nineteenth-century characteristics are incompatible with current demands.

Moreover, we have to make visible the dependence and influence of the education system on minors, who spend much of their lives in those places. The reason is that they face the relations of authority, relationships between equals and individual transformations. As a result, schools become the favored place in which to construct identities that have lasting effects on people's values and actions, on who they are and what they think they can be (Apple, 2011).

Productive Process, Market and School

In one of his critiques of education and education systems, Noam Chomsky (2004) raised the question of prevailing education models and his disturbing obsession with disabling teachers and students in an attempt to simplify people´ education to a set of rules and rules so strict – and obsolete – that it does not allow students to develop critically, making them perish in a labyrinth of procedures and techniques which seeks people´s homogenization and their gray immersion into an uncritical and obedient social mass.

Instead of promoting a critical spirit in students, which would allow the cycle of learned compliance to be broken, education is at the service of the market. In that market, neoliberalism is presented as a political, social, economic and pedagogical project which constitutes a form of public pedagogy.

It is a pedagogy based on the rationality of the market, which legitimates a cruel culture of fierce competition in which democracy has been transformed into a unique form of authoritarianism (Giroux, 2015).

Capital and the market, with the subordination of the school, generate the commodification of knowledge, intellectuality and affection, which is called cognitive capitalism (Morgan, 2016). In cognitive capitalism the social and productive transformations are arranged to serve the control of knowledge and its modes of production. As a result, we find that a financial logic has been introduced into schools, which implies governance, bureaucratization and the degradation of objectives to adapt to the freedoms of capital. Consequently equity, democracy and people are all endangered, as is the social construction of the school (Heilbronn, 2016). These problems arise not only because of the very nature of capitalism and globalization, which have proven to be the greatest equalizers in the history of mankind (Norberg, 2005), but also from the way in which they are executed. Thus, in the Western world, we have achieved levels of well-being unimaginable two centuries ago, but always by relying on citizen conformity and obedience (Carratalá, 2016). According to Erich Fromm, this is where the real problem occurs in Western democracies. Erich Fromm, who was preoccupied with the authoritarianism and submission in our society, identified an oppression of individuality, prompted by the demands of Western capitalism. These demands were at least as intense and effective as those present in the national socialist states and Soviet Union (Fromm, 2013).

There is a close relationship between education and work (Spring, 2015), and this has not escaped psychologists and education theorists. The changes in education promoted by neoliberalism, such as the privatization of the public school, the training of teachers and administrators to be producers of standardized results and academic capitalism, necessitate the critical development of educators to curb neoliberal education policies (Baltodano, 2012). People must develop in the scenario which has been given. Society is shown to be a fabric of interconnected citizens linked through work. This allows us to contribute our labor (when we do not own the resources or the means of production), and in return we receive the fruit of other people's workforces (Fromm, 2013). It is the task of the contemporary school, as conceived, to train citizens such that they can be appropriately introduced into social life through work.

Against this backdrop, resistance theorists have revealed the inability of the new labor force to intervene in the labor system they will be incorporated

in. The psychological space where this idea could emerge begins to destroy itself from the school, which imitates the dominant cultural model, leaving no space for the remaining groups with different socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, school objectives and methodology are based on a specific social pattern to which not all minorities have access, which means the academically successful pass through this obstacle course without much difficulty (meritocracy), while those students who fail to advance, assume the failure is theirs, and are gradually expelled in a screening process which does not take account of the students' realities.

In this way, education continually falls short in providing students with integral training. It would seem that all learning (or memorization) of academic content is targeted at the acquisition of skills and personal resources that enable the students to know and assimilate this content throughout their lives and for their lives. Just as workers on an assembly line perform a very specific task, decontextualized from other processes and in exchange for a salary at the end of the month, students concentrate on memorizing isolated content and passing the test to receive a final grade for each unit. Education results are justified in terms of competitive goals, labeled by governments and corporations using mercantilist language and thinking (McMurtry, 1991). It is based on globalizing neoliberal logics which subjugate the true objectives of education. In addition, they are clearly contradictory to policies and existing practices.

All in all, once students complete their studies, we obtain a qualified and obedient working mass. If we accept that education is strongly affected by neoliberal culture, it is imperative that educators know, understand and criticize it in the process of defense (Connel, 2013). Some scholars consider teachers to have a vague idea of what neoliberalism is and its pretensions to dismantle public services (Sleeter, 2008), and this makes neoliberal ideology work better, since it is not perceived as such (Blacker, 2013).

Relationships between Modern Production Systems and the Functioning of the Contemporary Western School

If we study contemporary society as a postmodern society which has left behind the materialism of the 20th century, it is easy to understand the abyss which is opening up between the characteristics of contemporary generations and the neoliberal socioeconomic paradigm. Traditionally institutions (such as the state, democracy, education or the labor market)

functioned according to the logic for which they were designed more than a century ago. However, nowadays, citizens' interests and demands are entering a higher stage. This is because of the benefits of Western democracies which is the basis upon which citizens' basic needs and aspirations are satisfied. Nowadays, the institutions of modernity clash head-on with postmodern society, which aspires to further values that these institutions will not be able to satisfy. Here lies the origins of the contradictions between the social and labor discourse, generated in the school, and through social, democratic and labor demands. The school must support students' integral education which includes training them to exercise freedom and a critical spirit, as well as training workers in the labor reality in which they are immersed. However, as we have already pointed out, Western education has limited itself to maintaining a specific cultural model through the imposition and reproduction of the dominant ideology, implicit in its highly hierarchical and undemocratic economic and labor models. With the reproduction of these characteristics through the school, the hierarchical model is perpetuated through the way future relationships are established between the social actors and it goes beyond the simple hierarchy in the labor market. The term "reproduction" is defined as in sociology. It recognizes the possibility of change or evolution (as indicated above with respect to the transition from modern to postmodern citizenship) and so indicates models of change to ensure the reproductive processes are maintained.

In this regard, the objectives which appear in the education laws and which appeal to the sense of students' self-realization are just a declaration of intentions. In the context of globalization driven by neoliberalism, characterized by education discourses on the commodification of knowledge, education of human capital, and its influence on national policies (Spring, 2008), the fact that education serves to promote autonomy and a critical spirit among students is a chimera, as demonstrated by the growth of power of neoliberal and neoconservative agendas at the international level. In this way, the democratizing objectives of Western education come into conflict with training for capitalist work, strongly hierarchical, competitive and generating inequalities. In this way, the market, and in a more general way, neoliberalism, exercise their particular influence on education. Moreover, they transform education to the point of generating this contradictory discourse (Apple, 1999). All this is sponsored by state care, which tries to foster a critical spirit and promote social mobility while submerging the students in the great uniform and uncritical mass that is the working class and reproducing the dominant ideology (Giroux, 1983). Therefore, critical pedagogy rejects education policies and practices, so it is necessary to rethink

social transformation in a more subtle and complex way, establishing active links with the classroom reality (Apple, 2011).

We understand that, from an economic dimension, education systems are influenced by the market, and are at the service of capital. Spring (2013) indicates that most education systems adopt objectives for economic growth. Thus, relationships between students and teachers are mediated through the integration of students into a competent economic system, in which education becomes an instrument for professional and economic development, reduced to preparation for employment (Kemmis, 1998). This leads to monotonous learning as students are taught to become competent and useful subjects from the labor point of view.

School reproduces the model of capitalist production on a small scale. It therefore reflects the inequality in the capitalist social structure (McLaren, 2016). In this context, it is impossible to introduce elements which guarantee an integral education so that students can acquire the intellectual skills necessary for them to assume positive freedom. However, from an economic dimension, it was initially believed that improvements in capital and labor would lead to better student training. In addition, governments invested in human capital, so neoliberalism ends with the value of social goods and presents education as just another product (Casey et al., 2013) which can be bought and sold like any other (Davies & Bansel, 2007). In this context, people's freedom within this economic-education system is very limited, if not non-existent.

According to Fromm, democracy fails in its ways and intentions to expand the borders of institutional freedom. As a result, a false sense of self-realization is generated in citizens because democracy does not prepare citizens or allow them to assume responsibility for democracy. With the natural development of industrially advanced Western democracies, citizens began to assume a normative (in reality an inequality) or community (motivated more out of emotional than rational reasons) commitment, but both were some distance from the original idea of democracy, where citizens do not have to form their identity in relation to the government but must assume the government as their own (Jaime, 2009).

Fromm proposes some integral citizens' formation, without denying the fact that human beings must be trained for the socio-labor reality in which they are born, but where they have enough psychological capacity to assume their own individuality and the responsibility that democracy requires. Yet it

is now clear that consumerism and globalization, an extreme form of capitalism, are causing an unprecedented increase in the differences between rich and poor, a form of economic discrimination based on social class, beliefs, race or sex (Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012).

Liberty and capitalism are incompatible. Alienated and obedient workers are a guarantee of economic benefit, but one that entails the loss of individual freedom.

In a dystopian way, all people who go through regulated education systems want to be transformed into alienated workers. Democratic models or more horizontal and cooperative production systems are not imitated in schools; on the contrary, the desire (from an economic point of view) is to promote a means of production in which workers are forced to sell their labor power at a price established by the market, which is changing, devalued and relative to the place and moment.

Hence, the only reason education cannot be improved in qualitative terms is because it would damage the prevailing economic system, perpetuated by the power elite that dominates education discourse, practices and policies, and which prioritizes the market and profit over other considerations and understands learning in terms of economic growth (Hursh & Henderson, 2011). In an education model like the one we proposed previously, a modernist or capitalist personality would not fit, we refer back to Fromm. Therefore, it is counterproductive for the community to be home to it, if it is immersed within the neoliberal system of production in Western culture. The mercantilization and subjugation of education to neoliberal capitalism contribute to the displacement of oppressed and minority communities and so it is necessary to construct a critical anti-capitalist public pedagogy (Lipman, 2011). If there is no struggle, or recovery of educational criticism, or encouragement of an education which inspires the challenge of authoritarian practices, the essence of the community's moral and transforming pedagogy will be lost (Giroux, 2016). Dependency on the system and the abandonment of a critical identity, if it ever existed, are the result. Consequently, a hierarchical power relationship will be built, in which people will have little to contribute beyond their economic production. It seems that neoliberalism is here to stay in the current education system (Maisuria, 2014).

Some conclusions: Practices of Resistance in Schools

These conclusions, which are not the complete, but a compilation, try to establish a line of reflection. We have seen how conformity is postulated as an element of evasion which allows people to avoid the isolation of claiming their individual *self* in the world around them (Fromm, 2013). Thus, the assumption of our individual *self*, different from each person around us, is the preceding step to the assumption of the positive freedom which allows people to become established as free people and independent of any other. This, on the other hand, involves accepting a kind of intellectual and emotional solitude, an *isolation* which is not acceptable to humans without prior preparation. In the endemic structure of Western education systems such preparation is not allowed. The reason is that in a uniform environment, the logical consequence is the risk that all subjects will choose to renounce that isolation. Therefore, they will also be renouncing positive freedom so they do not become separated from the group.

As we have mentioned before, the school is responsible due to its complicity in the very form of its structure and by the inaction of the education community. As it is structured around a classroom environment with the same schedules, similar materials for all students, similar content, similar evaluations, and so on, it is logical to think that the groups of students tend to behave with uniformity with regard to the rest of their peers (Gil et al., 2013). The same happens with all children. Likewise, the inaction of the education community when faced with such events is often somewhat unconscious. In many cases, no-one knows what is impregnated in students' consciences. In these cases, teacher training is aimed in one direction, while the road map marked out by the administration goes in another. Recent studies have shown that even in the very early stages of schooling, obedience to authority is a value within schools (Kawashima & Martins, 2015).

Obedience to an absolute rationalism defended by modernity generates the claim to admit the existence of a homogeneous society. Moreover, reason is imposed through universalization in that society, with the transmission of objectives and formalized content. What is more, the content is acquired with authority and transmitted vertically from teacher to student. As a result, students passively acquire it because the content does not allow for contradiction. The process of *learned compliance* enables contemporary students to assume the methodology of modernity which prevails in schools. To break this cycle of the transmission of conformity, it is necessary to involve the students in the processes which are part of their education. This

destroys the traditional roles imposed by the unidirectional transmission of content and the school opens up to the democratic demands of our society. Although the implicit messages of relations of authority and obedience are anchored in modernity, they are transmitted and learned with a certain coherence thanks to *contaminated vicarious learning* and *contaminated vicarious teaching*, which allows students to assume these contradictory discourses. Our proposal is that advocated by resistance theorists: that schools should adopt an active role in transmitting a new democratic culture, rather than transmitting the nineteenth-century elements servicing the market (Giroux, 2012). In other words, stop teaching conformity and promote transforming aspirations and critical spirit.

From a critical perspective, the ruling class ensures hegemony in schools. The objective is for the students to become dominated individuals who represent educational practices based on social authority and the unequal power and privilege relations of the education-government structure. Furthermore, this is part of an administrative bureaucracy which forces students to obey and adopt the prevailing ideology (McLaren, 2015). In this way, progress is limited to economic macro figures and indicators, which translate into an improvement in the quality of people's lives but perpetuate a relationship of inequality among citizens. This is the main symptom of the low democratic quality of Western countries and of what Fromm warned against: progress and welfare are not given by third parties but taken and protected by all those who benefit from them. Sometimes teachers become technicians in the service of the system. That is, they are uncritical, indolent, and unable to transmit anything other than the official curriculum, and of course, without a hint of enthusiasm for fostering critical thinking in their students. The education system imposes the curricula and controls the subjects taught, finding justification in pupil immaturity, while paradoxically, ensuring they remain immature by ensuring a lack of freedom and responsibility (Darling, 1992). This imposition demonstrates a relationship of inequality in which each protagonist is placed in an antagonistic place, that is dominant and dominated, and teaches them to assume this role throughout their lives. Previously we have referred to this as "learnt conformity", rather than one that is acquired by the infant in a natural way. Within this process of implicit imposition, vicarious learning becomes contaminated by the relations of authority and obedience established in the classroom, and which continue to exist in contemporary western society, as Fromm pointed out. Empowering and critical dialogues will enable teachers to create a pedagogical repertoire that allows for critical reflection, the autonomous construction of their teaching function and the opportunity to invite students to participate

in the lived experiences of growth and learning, rather than having to serve the establishment (Aloni, 2013). We may conclude that the school structure conditions obedience. In addition, teachers are comfortable having submissive and obedient pupils, as this facilitates and simplifies the mechanical work of the classroom. However, some studies have shown that authority in the classroom is not a guarantee of better learning. What is more, there is evidence that students seem happier and more committed when given a certain amount of freedom and democracy in the classroom than those who view the teachers' authority as vertical and absolute (Lakshman & Schubert, 2015). This perspective offers us the key to understanding that a hierarchical society model is transmitted through the hidden curriculum. Resistance Theory appeals to teachers and students to strive to break this reproductive cycle that sustains one of the most contradictory discourses between the aspirations of the school and Western democratic reality: integration in a class society. This opens the door to a more inclusive and democratic education. According to Giroux (1983), students' failures are the failures of society, never of the students themselves. Society molds the school turning it into the main stage of social and cultural reproduction. Therefore, it is logical that the school assumes the responsibility of leaving out of this scenario all those who, because of their race, sex or socioeconomic origin, cannot adapt to the requirements. The prevailing school model in the 21st century is obsolete, and the neoliberal agendas promote a commodified economic school, which is at the service of capital. Moreover, the market reigns with its law and imposes on education its rationing, hierarchies and mechanisms of competition in schools. As a result, it creates business-like schools with subjected teachers and obedient students (Connell, 2013). In addition, there is no room for criticism, reflection or an alternative to the proposed model. Critical teachers have to understand the true discourse of the school in order to break this cycle. Nevertheless, nowadays teachers no longer master the language capitalism uses to achieve reproduction through the school (Sleeter, 2008), and are limited to assuming the ways and customs of other older teachers, stagnating the school culture (Bolívar, 1996). Moreover, they turn teachers into part of the reproductive machinery. To reverse this situation, the precursor initiatives for change cannot come from outside the education community, but they must be the ones who initiate a response (Marcelo & Estebaranz, 1999). As we have already pointed out, in order to achieve this, university education must provide teachers with the necessary tools to understand the latent hidden mechanisms in the school and produce, in turn, a response which guarantees that democratic ideals and social demands will be included in the new school discourse. Despite the difficulty of proposing a critical pedagogy in the classroom, teachers

must present knowledge in a problematic way, in such a way that students seek to collectively investigate social change (Collinson, 2012; Damianidou & Phtiaka, 2016; Rogers, 2007). A teacher trained in critical pedagogy will have the tools to break the circle which connects the school of modernity with postmodern society through learned conformity. This process involves rethinking the figure of the teacher in the classroom. In a more horizontal and democratic society, teachers have to abandon their authoritarian role. They have all the valid knowledge of the classroom and they will guide student learning, promoting a critical spirit with regard the acquisition of ways and customs which are socially contaminated.

At this point, a new debate on teacher training should begin, and in turn, focus on what elements of cultural reproduction should be present throughout this training. Without straying from the main topic, but being aware of its importance, we must point out that teacher training is one of the fundamental elements in critical discourse, since teaching in school is part of the general discourse of the Theory of Resistance. Knowledge and social responsibility must be introduced into future teacher training. It must be training which educates and enlightens teachers, turning them into critical individuals capable of transmitting that same critical capacity to their students. However, it is difficult to train teachers to transform society in only a few years of initial training (Pittard, 2015). In the new school of the future, a space must be reserved for people's integral education. Teachers, families and students must develop critical awareness and fight for change, freedom and autonomy, without waiting for the hegemonic elites who control the school to do so, because as Paulo Freire points out (2014), that would be naive. The school has to remodel its structure in order to generate a coherent discourse and teaching has to be aimed at promoting a critical spirit in students. Likewise, the transmission of a democratic culture does not fit into the rigidity of current school structures, meaning that we cannot educate for democracy in a vertical school which recognizes the class system and empowers it through meritocracy. A pessimistic view is that the school, conceived of as a political instrument of the ruling classes, finds itself caught between two competing agendas which it will not be able to get rid of without ending up following one or the other: "So much the better for the public; so much the worse for its schools" (Johnston, 2012, p. 121).

There is much more thinking to be done here. We share hope in trying to think about education and education relations between teachers and students in terms of collaborative, understood and criticized work. Therefore, we recognize the different points of view, the disagreements and the attempt

to solve them, and even the agreement to differ (Beckett, 2013). Education in and for freedom and the exercise of democracy are at the same time the forerunner of and hope for change in the constant pursuit of a just and diverse community (Fielding, 2012). The values of democratic education must be cultivated and protected in order to maintain societies where respect for human rights prevails over the various potential ideologies. Educating children does not mean seeing them as passive objects to be manipulated educationally, but as subjects with basic freedoms that must be cultivated so they can become fully autonomous (Giesinger, 2010). It is important to prepare them for life, with a strong education in the values and virtues important for life and human development (Curren & Kotzee, 2014; Sanderse et al., 2015). Education has to value the characteristics which define these societies, and to ensure the active and participative inclusions of each new subject in social life. Although research linking inequality with social class and education is unpromising (Lynch, 2015; Marsh, 2011; Rumberger, 2010), critical pedagogy and education professionals must advocate an open, reflexive pedagogy, and an education aimed at reducing egocentrism, self-knowledge, self-criticism and rectification, personal maturity that is evolutionary and helps us cultivate our own thinking (Herrán, 2014). It should be emancipating and liberating, a poetic education, in the aesthetic, moral and intellectual sense (Hassen, 2004). If students become aware of the processes of social reproduction occurring around them and act accordingly. In this way, future citizens will shape their own value system (which should not conflict with that of others), and let their environment influence them. It is important to be aware not only of the dangers involved in obedience, but also of the benefits which arise from freedom.

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Doing pedagogical conversations (with spirituality and fat) as pedagogists in early childhood education

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Abstract: In this article, the authors respond to emerging articulations of the work of a pedagogist or pedagogical facilitator in early childhood education in Canada. This article is grounded in two intentions: we (1) share the tentative pedagogical conversations that we have as pedagogists who centre particular concerns, interests, and accountabilities; and we (2) launch our conversation from our desire to re-imagine how everyday pedagogies shape children's experiences with spiritual knowings and children's relations with fat. Sharing a narration from a pedagogical inquiry research project, we each offer a familiar developmental reading of the moment, gesture toward a partial re-engagement grounded in post-developmental pedagogies, and then weave our thinking with spirituality and fat together to complexify our propositions. We intentionally refuse to define the work of a pedagogist in a universalizable or technical manner. Instead, we argue that putting our pedagogist work into conversation draws our practices into uneasy, difficult, often contradictory relations and makes visible some potential futures (and their exclusions) we enact as we work to answer to the complex education spaces we inherit and re-create with educators and children.

Keywords: pedagogist, post-developmental pedagogies, children's spirituality, childhood obesity.

Amid an intensifying push, in the field and post-secondary professional training programs, toward deepening the pedagogical character of early

childhood education (ECE) in Canada, early years programs are increasingly creating opportunities for educators to connect with “pedagogists”, “pedagogistas” or “pedagogical facilitators” to support their everyday practice. Who pedagogists are, what pedagogists do, and how the work of a pedagogist unfolds is a local (Ainsworth, 2016; Atkinson & Biegun, 2017; Kummen & Hodgins, 2019; Nxumalo, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Hodgins, 2017; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006; Vintimilla, 2018) and often controversial question. As evidenced by the multiple responsibilities, educational paradigms, and practices that pedagogist roles are justified through in various programs and municipalities (from quality assurance to promoting emergent curriculum through developing locally-responsive pedagogies), the actions of a pedagogist are never inseparable from the dominant political and ontological climate pedagogists confront in education spaces. That is, the work of a pedagogist is entangled with how the situated contours of ongoing settler colonialism, neoliberal educational imperatives, environmental precarities, systemic inequities and injustices, and privileged and silenced knowledges of childhood, learning, curriculum, pedagogy, relationality, and land shape local possibilities for pedagogical collaborations.

Concurrently, the emerging role of a pedagogist in a Canadian context is indebted to the continuing Reggio Emilia education project in Italy (Nxumalo, Vintimilla & Nelson, 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot & Sanchez, 2015; Vintimilla, 2018). In Reggio Emilia (a place and a paradigm) the value, work, and training of a pedagogista is articulated in response to local politics, inheritances, and precarities. The role of a pedagogist in Canada is, then, also a question of how we might mobilize, in this place, these borrowed, displaced, and extracted practices of what it means to do pedagogical work. This means that pedagogists must answer to the unequal worlds that children, families, communities, and educators inherit while simultaneously crafting and re-crafting the practices, relations, and accountabilities that shape the role of a pedagogist as one of creating pedagogies that answer to the situated politics and precarities of this place.

We are pedagogists who locate our collaborations with early childhood educators in Ontario and British Columbia at this doubled, entangled responsibility: we work to answer to multiple histories, inheritances, lives, and precarities while constantly putting at risk the practices, knowledges, and relations that we work toward responding to our times with. Our intention in this article is two-fold. We want to (1) put into public the imperfect interdisciplinary pedagogical conversations that we have as pedagogists who centre particular concerns, interests, and accountabilities. In the body of

the article, we (2) hinge our conversation upon our discomfort with (and desire to re-imagine) how developmental perspectives in dominant ECE in Canada shape children's experiences that inform our respective research: children's spiritual knowings for Meagan and for Nicole, children's relations with fat. Arguing that engagements with spirituality and fat are highly regulated, we propose that different possibilities for attuning to spiritual understandings of the more-than-human world and to childhood obesity become possible when we trace how our situated connections with spirituality and fat layer upon, diverge from, and complexify one another.

In this article we share a moment - a narration from a pedagogical inquiry Meagan is contributing to - that animates one of our many pedagogical conversations. This narration is one example of how we bring the work of our various roles to each other and is part of a larger SSHRC-funded project in which Meagan engages with educators and children in a child care centre on a weekly basis. The children and educators from a toddler classroom and a preschool classroom embark on weekly walks to a local cemetery along with Meagan and other researchers who participate in this action-research in the role of a pedagogist. Our pedagogical conversations are often and varied, but this particular moment is one that we have spent much time thinking with and we offer it here as one example of how we put our work into conversation. We each offer a mainstream developmental reading of the moment, gesture toward a tentative re-engagement grounded in post-developmental pedagogies, and then weave our thinking with spirituality and fat together to complexify, trouble, and put at risk our propositions. The back and forth nature of our reading of this moment is deliberate and puts into practice Stenger's (2018) concept of relaying, in which the passing of ideas back and forth does not refute, but rather always adds and complexifies. Putting our work into conversation is, we contend, a necessary practice for our work as pedagogists as we endeavour to answer to the complex education spaces we inherit and re-create with educators and children. Pedagogical conversations pull our theorizing and practices into uneasy, difficult, often contradictory relations that help to make visible some edges, exclusions, and potential futures we enact. To begin, we offer our tentative approach to being pedagogists.

Responding to Situated and Urgent Inheritances as a Pedagogist

It is with caution that we offer our understanding of what it means to be a pedagogist. We want to keep open the question of what responding, as

a pedagogist, to the specificities of the Canadian ECE context that we inherit and work within might demand. We have become pedagogical co-conspirators for multiple reasons: we share methodological and theoretical commitments to unsettling hegemonic developmental discourses in settler colonial Canada; our projects contribute to wider research-practice collectives (e.g., *Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory* and *Climate Action Childhood Network*) where we are encouraged to constantly think together; we work collaboratively, as part of a larger team, to support community-based pedagogists in a province-wide professional learning initiative in Ontario (the *Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care*); and as doctoral students and early career researchers working in Ontario and British Columbia, we have woven our scholarly activities together as we have grown our research programs, such that we have exchanged so many drafts, theories, tensions, and stories that disentangling our work seems impossible. These activities are, for us, entangled: our pedagogical work across multiple projects and collaborations is always woven with our research, practice, and curriculum-making. While we resist offering a singular, universalized way of embodying this role, we do want to make clear that the conversations we share are of a certain mode and meaning. For us, being pedagogists is grounded in a heart-filled trust (an idea we borrow from our colleague, Dr. Cristina D. Vintimilla, who reminds us that pedagogists' labour is always "heart work") we place in our collaboration. We conceptualize our pedagogist relationship as more than an acknowledgement that our work has put us in relation with each other; we consider it an achievement that always carries the risk of failure (Stengers, 2018). In our pedagogical relations we ask each other strange questions (Stengers, 2018) - questions that do not lend themselves to easy answers and often rip open ideas that we have held dear in our research and our work with children and educators. Although our pedagogical conversations are generative, they are rarely easy. They require we have a specific form of trust, one that is based on a feminist ethic in which we refuse to compete with each other as neoliberal academic spaces often ask us to. We offer each other immanent critique (Stengers, 2008) as we acknowledge that our critical questions become generative parts of our conversational assemblages. We do not perpetuate critique that seeks to break down or falsify the ideas we offer each other.

Echoing our colleagues Nxumalo, Vintimilla, and Nelson (2018), we feel uneasy about "the currency and privilege that…the job title that we have each gone by for several years, *pedagogista*, carr[ies]…our grapplings stem from what at times feels like an all-too-smooth assimilation as 'best practice' of pedagogies and curriculum developed within very particular understand-

ings in their original context in Italy" (p. 2). Our pedagogist mentors - Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Dr. B. Denise Hodgins, and Dr. Cristina D. Vintimilla - have taught us that pedagogical collaborations are pedagogical in their difficulty. To create possibilities for doing pedagogy beyond neoliberal logics requires that we notice, and become suspicious when, our practices become habitual, transferrable, or exceptionalized. Learning from Indigenous scholars who refuse and reconfigure the Euro-Western foundations of pedagogy and curriculum (Todd, 2016; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Tuhiwai Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2019), we take seriously that our work as pedagogists is never removed from the violent histories of education projects in Canada and that thinking about pedagogy as white settlers is never inherently redemptive, innocent, just, nor equitable (Tuck & Yang, 2012). To reify the role of a pedagogist in Canada as a universalizable or desirable position for "improving" education is to once again participate in neoliberal education projects. In our work, we are inspired by Nxumalo's (with Vintimilla & Nelson, 2018) contention that

> taking seriously the settler colonial and anti-Black foundations of education in North America, means that the work of the pedagogista in supporting early childhood educators in their pedagogical and curricular encounters needs to include finding ways to respond to these emplaced violences from a speculative imaginary that recognizes yet is not defined by erasure, displacement and dehumanization. (p. 16)

We understand our role as pedagogists as negotiating this layered practice of, as Nxumalo contends, *recognizing but not being defined by* the complex, often violent, everyday worlds we must respond to through our pedagogical work with educators. Our work as pedagogists never rests with critical analysis and also never ignores the urgent need for critical engagements with contemporary and historical inequities. Consistent with articulations of pedagogist accountabilities offered by Atkinson and Biegun (2017), Hodgins (2015), and Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., (2015), we anchor our practice in the non-innocent, non-redemptive situated ethical and political intentions, convictions, and response-abilities (Haraway, 2016) we carry as pedagogists within neoliberal and colonial ECE spaces in Canada.

Staking (or, Beginning to Notice) our Pedagogist Intentions and Accountabilities

There are practices we hold as fundamental to our role as pedagogists in ECE in Canada: fostering ongoing collaborative pedagogical conversations

with educators (Atkinson & Biegun, 2017; Hodgins, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind & Kocher, 2016); participating in pedagogical collectives that see education as a common, public sphere (Hodgins, Atkinson & Wanamaker, 2017; Berger, 2015; Vintimilla, 2018); noticing how we are implicated in, shaped by, and accountable to everyday pedagogical relations (Land & Danis, 2016; Moss, 2019; Nxumalo, Vintimilla & Nelson, 2018); attending and responding to multiple lives and precarities by understanding education as more than only a human concern (Haro Woods et al., 2018; Nxumalo, 2017; Taylor, 2017); deepening the pedagogical character of everyday ECE practices through approaches to documentation and dialogue that emphasize the complexity and politicality of these practices (Hodgins, Thompson & Kummen, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015); and crafting tentative, responsive, locally-relevant pedagogies with children, educators, and lively worlds (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Wapenaar & DeSchutter, 2018; Yazbeck & Danis, 2015). We also attend to our situated, personal answerabilities as pedagogists: what might Meagan (a pedagogist with a particular history, concerns, and relations) need to answer to in pedagogical collaborations? How might Nicole (as a different pedagogist with a different history, concerns, and relations) be implicated differently in pedagogical commons? Our responses to these questions are, of course, mobile and constantly reforming. However, we take seriously that as specific bodies in specific places in specific entanglements, our work as pedagogists might hold shared orientations but will never be entirely coincident. Our own pedagogist work, though marked by different places and response-abilities, is acutely entangled with each other's pedagogist work. How, then, might we begin to notice our emplaced answerabilities as pedagogists who are in constant conversation?

As we think with the dominant knowledge politics we inherit in Euro-Western education, where some ways of knowing are hierarchically emphasized (for example: school readiness, self-regulation, literacy and numeracy; Salazar Pérez & Cahill, 2016) over others (Indigenous cosmologies, bodied knowledges, more-than-human relations), we feel strongly that as pedagogists we must refute or complexify these taken-for-granted epistemic structures. We see our work as a feminist citational practice (Ahmed, 2013, 2017; Tuck, Yang & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2015): we are accountable to the knowledges we centre and silence, and to the histories, inheritances, lives, and worldviews that we presence and erase in our pedagogist work. Accordingly, we each locate our scholarship at unique intersections of education and early childhood studies, an interdisciplinary field. Meagan's pedagogical inquiry research investigates children's spirituality and Nicole's work complexifies childhood obesity. These are both concerns that intersect dif-

ferent academic disciplines (spirituality: religious studies, pagan studies, holistic learning; obesity: physiology, critical obesity studies, critical health education). We approach these concerns with shared theoretical loyalties, including feminist new materialisms (Barad, 2007), feminist science studies (Haraway, 2016; Stengers, 2008) and common worlds perspectives[1] (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2018). Exploring possibilities toward post-developmental pedagogies (Blaise, 2014) is a core ethical and political intention for us, as we work to respond to the normalizing interpretive clout held by developmental approaches to understanding children's learning in ECE (Burman, 2008; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). We are learning that we must activate the theoretical approaches we have in common in very different ways to respond to the specificities of thinking with spiritual knowings and with fat. Our shared unease with how dominant conceptions of spirituality and obesity shape children's relations with spiritual knowings and fat in particular human-centered and developmental ways (spirituality: Lideman & Aarnio, 2007; Matheijsn, 2010; Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013; obesity: Elliott, 2016; Evans, 2010; Evans & Colls, 2011; Ward, 2016) partially informs what it is we want to answer to as pedagogists.

This article is one thread of our work toward articulating why it matters that we collaborate as pedagogists (and as researchers) within the specific Canadian ECE contexts we work. Borrowing inspiration from the interdisciplinary ethics enacted by Haraway (2016) and Stengers (2008; Tola, 2016), wherein generating knowledge is a practice of risk, accountability, and response-ability, we argue that intentionally immersing our work in uneasy dialogue can expand our methods for attuning to children's relations with spirituality and fat. Our overarching intention is to make visible the uncertain, tense, and generous work of following how we might 'do' pedagogist dialogues. Thinking with a story of a 'magic tree', which Meagan experienced and recounted to Nicole, we experiment with how actively entangling our projects might work to expand our possibilities for doing spirituality and fat otherwise. We offer speculative post-developmental engagements to share with one another how we activate some of our shared theoretical loyalties differently as we attend to our respective concerns with spirituality and fat. Following this, we place our understandings into conversation to trace how they might, and might not, respond to our accountabilities as pedagogists.

[1] Scholars and educators who think with a common worlds perspective (please see the *Common Worlds Research Collective,* www.commonworlds.net) work to unsettle Euro-Western anthropocentric and developmental educational inheritances (Nelson, Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo 2018; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017) by responding to how human lives are entangled with, and accountable to, complex relations with more-than-human others amid ongoing settler colonialism and ecological precarities.

Doing Spirituality and Fat with Pedagogical Conversations

A magic tree story

Walking along a busy road on the lands of the Attawandaran, Anisshinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Leni-Lunaape peoples in what is currently known as London, Ontario, Canada, a group of young children and adults head to a local cemetery. Educators and children have been visiting this place, which they have named "The Deer Park", for a long time. Woodland Cemetery has been operating in London since 1830. We share this place with various wildlife, such as deer, turkeys, geese, squirrels, and robins. The cemetery is vast and has many areas to explore. For the past month, we have chosen to stay in a grassy area that is home to mature trees and two intriguing drainage grates.

At first we feel uncomfortable remaining in this space - we feel itchy desires in our bodies to move on, to explore. Educators and researchers resist the urge to move on and encourage children to remain in the grassy space and notice what this place offers to us. Many children experiment with dropping leaves and pine cones into the drainage gates, hypothesizing about crocodiles who live there and feed off these offerings of sticks and cones; some children find memorial plaques on stones and tree trunks as adults attentively discuss the meanings of these plaques, pushing through our own uncomfortableness of discussing death with children. We offer explanations such as: "someone is buried here" and "this is a place where people can remember people they love once they have died". A child runs to Meagan as she pauses with a group of children at the drainage grate. "People are buried here," she informs the group, as she runs back to explore the plaque.

Alongside an educator, Anne-Marie, some children begin to explore a large beech tree, running their hands against the knotty bark of the tree, moss and nut shells. After we return to the centre, Anne-Marie tells Meagan of a child, Leonard[2], discovering a knot in the tree: *Leonard begins to press a large piece of bark into the knot and declares that the tree is magic and the bark is a magic key that provides entry to the tree.* The educator recalls the palpable change in the children's energy, as they run and dance and find more magical key holes in the ground. Anne-Marie describes another shift in the children, a shift from questioning to one of knowing. The children

[2] All children's names are pseudonyms

know that the tree is magic; collective meaning making unfolds with the tree and bark and children and uneasy relations with death. As Meagan and Anne-Marie reflect on this moment, the magic tree feels important; like a consequential relationship we have crafted with this place. The magic tree also raises many questions: should we 'correct' the children and provide the scientific explanations for knots in bark? How do conversations about 'magic' connect to the theories on life and death we make visible within the cemetery? How might we respond to children's running and dancing with the magic tree? How do we, as researchers and educators, make meaning of the magic tree with children – and, how do we collectively unsettle our familiar habits for coming to understand with the magic tree?

Thinking Spirituality and Fat in Conversation (with the Magic Tree)

For us, thinking the magic tree, spirituality, and fat requires that we attend to nuanced and multiple (and still imperfect and partial) understandings of the event. As we work to activate post-developmental perspectives in our work as pedagogists, we understand that how we do spirituality and fat is never an intact, paused, idealized practice. To keep our engagements with spirituality and fat lively, relevant, and responsive, we argue that we need to continually drag our understandings into uneasy conversations that complexify or call us to revisit how we make spirituality and fat matter with children. The limits and borders of our post-developmental doings are made visible to us in many ways - including, but certainly not limited to, through our pedagogical conversations. In the following conversation, we do not work to build 'better' practices for doing spirituality or fat. Participating in pedagogical dialogue together is not a "solution" for addressing the situated boundaries of the places, theories, and lives we make choices to centre and silence in our work. We do unapologetically want to craft pedagogical relations where putting our work into conversation becomes a method for constantly tracing how our work does and does not respond to our everyday relations with children. Importantly, we recognize that the conversations we share in this article are between two female white settler pedagogists with similar ontological inheritances, privileges, and worldviews. We acknowledge that in discussing magic as a way to reconceptualize relations with humans and more-than-humans, the scholarship of many Indigenous authors who have graciously shared Indigenous ways of relating to the more-than-human world (Hall, 2008; Kimmerer, 2013 Simpson, 2008; Todd, 2017; Watts, 2013). As white settlers, we hold an ethical commitment to not co-opt Indigenous ontoepistemologies to further our own scholarship, so while we acknowledge that

some parallels may be evident in how we consider spirituality and bodies in relation to the more-than-human world, we do name this as decolonizing work. Rather, this is about disrupting inherited Euro-Western approaches as part of a larger, incredibly complicated project of dismantling Euro-Western hegemonies in current early childhood discourses in Canada. We want to show how our approaches to doing spirituality and fat complexify one another, how we engage in pedagogical conversations together, and how our collaborations are partial and contingent but always oriented toward responding to our times.

Meagan: My first shift from developmentalism happens in how I choose to define spirituality in my thinking alongside children. I diverge from developmental theories that situate spiritual development as an intrinsic human capacity, rooted in biology or physiology or defined by stage theories as "change, transformation, growth, or maturation" (Benson, Roehlkepartain & Rude, 2003, p. 210). Instead, thinking with Skott-Myhre (2018) I conceptualize a specific spirituality rooted in immanence, collectivist, and minoritarian knowledges. I ground this spirituality in ecological practices to challenge the Cartesian divide between human/nature and the anthropocentric privileging of human intellect and rational thought. I consider this spirituality as not a religious one, but one that it more analogous with magic, one that works with the material world and is considered the life-force of both humans and the more-than-human (Mies & Shiva, 2014). I broaden my thinking of spirituality through common worlding and new material feminisms, and reconvene the constituents of our worlds to include non-human life-forms, forces and entities (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Kummen, 2016). By broadening my definitions of children's spiritual understandings to include the unseen or intangible associated with magical thinking I also wrest children's 'superstitious' or 'paranormal' experiences of the world from developmental classifications of imagination and cognitive deficit (Lideman & Aarnio, 2007; Mathijesn, 2010; Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013).

The magic tree, in developmental discourses, quickly loses its magic. The magic becomes a trick, a clever mechanism for scaffolding children's learning about nature and science. Developmentally, magical thinking is defined as "involving attribution of causal effects on real life events by either a thought or action that is physically unconnected to the events" (Bolton, Dearsley, Madronal-Luque & Baron-Cohen, 2002, p. 480). Magical thinking positioned this way clearly delineates what is True or Real as the tangible and physical, that which is able to be objectively measured, and thus the only knowledge deemed legitimate is that which is 'rational'. This privileging

of verifiable 'rational' scientific thought has been instrumental in silencing voices from other thought collectives (Stengers, 2018) specifically those of women and Indigenous peoples (Skott-Myhre, 2018). Developmentalists see benefit in magical thinking as long as it remains situated in the appropriate stages of sequential child development, the younger the child the more acceptable it is for them to engage in magical thinking, but as the child progresses, magical thinking should give way to logical thinking, or else it becomes problematic (Bolton, Dearsley, Madronal-Luque & Baron-Cohen, 2002; Mathijesn, 2010). Reversely, developmentalists also positively associate magical thinking with imagination (Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013) which makes magic developmentally advantageous in positive correlations to cognitive development and academic success (Smith & Mathur, 2009).

Nicole: Dominant Euro-Western frameworks for understanding childhood obesity adopt a medicalized and developmental approach. Critical obesity scholars including Guthman (2013) and Rich (2010) detail how this developmental framing allows for excess body fat to be marked as an unhealthy pathology because of the present and future risks of inhabiting a body that does not meet normative age, race, and gender-based bioscientific markers for health. As Elliott (2016) and Evans and Colls (Evans 2010; Evans & Colls, 2011) make visible, these approaches to doing childhood obesity invest in developmental trajectories that decisively assert that fat children become fat adults. This understanding of obesity positions fat as readily quantifiable and knowable, human-centered, necessitating tracking and intervention, and roots fat within social discourses that stigmatize and moralize against fat bodies (Beausoleil & Ward, 2010; Rice, 2016; Rich, 2011). Narratives of normative, fit, and healthy childhood development facilitate the creation of fat phobic and fat mitigating ECE curriculum, which reminds children and educators that it is their personal responsibility to become healthy adults through carefully controlled practices of healthy eating and exercise.

Adopting a developmental childhood obesity lens, the magic tree matters because it draws children outside and into movement. The magic tree is a resource that I might deploy to encourage children to run, jump, and climb as they reach their recommended 180 minutes of daily physical activity. With children, I might hope we can investigate where more magic key holes are, carrying the magic as a motivator for us to move our bodies across the grassy terrain of the cemetery. I may capture the curiosities the magic tree invites, encouraging children to keep letting the energy the tree shares move their bodies quickly as we run around the space and raise our heart rates into a 'healthy' activity range.

Meagan: Feminist new materialisms and common worlds allows me to think beyond the allegiance to rational thought offered by developmental psychology to break from the binaries that western ontologies use to separate mind/body, nature/culture, spirituality/rationalism. This involves a recognition that being in the world allows us to have knowledge always produced and reproduced by engaging with the material world (Taylor & Ivinson, 2013). Children's bodies intra-act (Barad, 2007) with tree bodies and in this intra-active assemblage tree/children/educators/spaces/magic become agentic, not in ways in which one element causes or precedes the other but as multiple and emerging in consistently different ways as they intermingle (Barad, 2007). To see beyond the singular and universal developmental understandings of the magic tree moment, I must slow down and pay close attention (Starhawk, 2004; Tsing, 2015) to how the tree, children, adults, and other more-than-human actors mutually shape this particular assemblage. I ask 'what do trees do?' 'what do children do?' and most importantly 'what do trees and children do?' This act of slowing down itself resists progressive neoliberal logics that are deeply embedded in early childhood practices; logics that push educators to move children through sequential stage theories towards becoming a rational adult who participates in society in acceptable and preferred ways (Burman, 2008; Swadner, 2010).

Thinking post-developmentally, I think *with* magic. And name magic deliberately knowing it is a word that makes uncomfortable and disrupts scientific rationality (Starhawk, 1982). I choose define magic, not as fictional imaginings, but as relations with natural materials that foster new ways of relating to natural entities (Schutten & Rogers, 2011). By taking seriously children's spiritual connections to this magic tree, the child/tree intra-action becomes a place of meaning-making, one that challenges the individual agency of children, and instead calls attention to the collective construction of meaning (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) and forefronts more-than-human assemblages (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, & Blaise, 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Khattar & Montpetit, forthcoming). Thinking *with* (Rautio, 2017) magic foregrounds the historical, cultural, and political governance of spirituality, and by taking magic seriously I begin to see the multiple stories that take place simultaneously in this intra-action as a site for possible disruption of neoliberal developmental discourses of individualism and anthropocentrism. Here, stories of androcentric erasure of spiritual feminist knowledges (Skott-Myhre, 2018; Starhawk,1982) grapple and speak with taxonomic classifications of dendrology to challenge the taken-for-granted ways that developmental psychology silenced some and made others norm.

Nicole: My understanding of obesity responds to dominant childhood obesity discourses by foregrounding children's relationships with fat(s) as an ongoing activity, rather than a biological axiom governed by developmental logic. This call to 'do' fat(s) is grounded in post-developmental approaches to ECE, such as those articulated by scholars including Blaise (2013; 2014), Lenz Taguchi (2011) and Rautio and Jokinen (Rautio, 2013; Rautio & Jokinen, 2015). Rather than foregrounding pre-articulated developmental curriculum frameworks, these scholars attend to how lively and situated relationships, responsibilities, politics, and tensions animate our learning encounters (Nxumalo, 2017). I am interested in *doing* pedagogy as a reciprocal, ongoing, complex process (Iorio, Hamm, Parnell & Quintero, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind & Kocher, 2016). I argue that a post-developmental understanding of childhood obesity might take seriously how we *do* obesity with children – that is, how we craft, respond to, and silence different relationships with fat in everyday moments. This situates fat as an ethical, political, and pedagogical activity, where educators, children, place, and fat cells are in constant conversation with dominant discourses of childhood obesity, and we need to be accountable to the relations with fat that we enact and silence with children.

With the magic tree, a post-developmental ethic of doing childhood obesity refuses any easy translation of pre-set physical activity promotion activities into this moment and instead attunes to how the questions, connections, and pedagogies we make possible shape how children might craft different situated relationships with fat. If I try to harness the energy the tree makes with children toward meeting a physical activity requirement, how can I be accountable to the moving, relationships, and connections that I prohibit? What happens if I understand moments of children running their fingers along the bark of the tree while their subcutaneous fat cushions their finger bones as moments of exploring this cemetery place with fat? When childhood obesity rhetoric constantly shouts morbidity and mortality statistics, what kinds of relationships with fat might we make with a place already storied with nuanced narratives of living and dying? How can I be accountable to the fats that I make possible here, in this place, with this magic tree, with children?

Meagan: Going back to my understanding of spirituality, one that I couple with magic, I think about how Dahlberg and Moss (2005) name meaning making as an inherently political act. I can link the silencing of magic back to modernist aims of making the Other into the same (Skott-Myhre, 2018; Starhawk, 1982) and through this I can think about whose voices have been

silenced in the erasure of collective spirituality, specifically Indigenous and women's voices. But where I am grappling, is what does centring magic do now? What other possible ways of knowing may also be validated by taking magic seriously. I want to be clear: I am not advocating that everyone should believe in magic (Stengers, 2018) or begin to incorporate immanent feminist spirituality in their pedagogical practice. What I am concerned with is how dominant ideas of science and rationality define certain ways of knowing as dispensable (Stengers, 2018). I wonder how I can let magic flourish and resist urges to *use* magic as a technology to reproduce dominant neoliberal ideologies that are so taken-for-granted in the discourses of quality ECE (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). By thinking with magic, I wonder how I might continue to make meaning of pedagogical practices in ways that attend to the lives of the children and educators I collaborate with.

Nicole: I think that this tension of *using* vs *sitting with* magic is really timely – I hear echoes of post-developmental scholars, like Peter Moss (2016), who make visible how instrumental pedagogies – here, pedagogies that use magic – shape childhoods in line with neoliberal ideas of citizenship and success. This feels to me like a type of meaning making that plays a match game with magic, trying to find where magic slots into pre-set curriculum and then taking those as the 'valuable' pieces of magic. I think that's a really relevant critique, but what I think is really interesting when we put our work into conversation is how our practices of meaning making with magic are rooted in our existing relationships with magic – and, how those relationships are entangled with our research and pedagogical intentions. I think that there's something in your work where you carry an intention to notice magic; that your work with spirituality means that you work hard to attune with magic. I do not know if my commitment to thinking fat outside developmental logic already 'knows' magic, and I think that matters. It reminds me of Haraway's (2016) idea about "passing patterns back and forth, giving and receiving, patterning, holding the unasked-for pattern in one's hands, response-ability" (p. 12). I can almost think of the idea of noticing how our understandings of magic matter with fats as an unasked for pattern that I have to stick with. I would not have thought about how I make fat differently with our practices of making magic meaningful, but different responses with magic definitely enact different relationships with fat: relationships with fat that co-opt magic to technical ends, relationships with fats that push into tree trunks, relationships with fat that sit quietly shivering on a chilly morning. I think these all matter. They all have different consequences, and, importantly, they matter with magic, which kind of tugs at the importance of putting our different concerns into conversations for me.

Meagan: I do actively attune to magic but your discussion of fat and magic has me thinking of magic in ways that I have not thought about before, which is really important. It is important because even though our pedagogical and research focuses are different, we have an obligation to put them into uneasy conversations. This is at the heart of why we wanted to write this paper. When we first starting thinking about writing this, one of the biggest challenges was finding a way to connect magic and fat. As we have continued to think about this and engaged in discussion, I have become less concerned with making concrete connections and become more interested in the way these transdisciplinary conversations matter. Modernism and neoliberalism, and most definitely settler colonialism, have established a singular way of knowing (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2003; Tuck, 2013). I hope that the type of transdisciplinary conversation might be a move toward disrupting positivist Western ways of knowing that have been so predominant in ECE. When we weave together different knowledges we highlight how layered our stories and our worlds are. Drawing attention to these layers is important and politically significant because it manifests a way to engage in fluid multiplicity in our pedagogies. By nesting stories or knowledge, I believe we have the potential to hear and centre voices that have been previously marginalized through desire for consensus and universality.

Nicole: This reminds me of a provocation offered by Hamilton, Subramaniam, and Willey (2017), who speak about the politics of scientific ways of knowing and how these contribute to perpetuating settler colonial ways of knowing the world. Hamilton et al. contend that "science is constitutive of colonialism. Science is more than simply an instrumental extension of colonial power. Science and colonization are co-emergent, co-constituted, and co-produced; one cannot understand science without colonialism or colonialism without science" (p. 613). This makes me think about what our ways of meaning making in ECE are constitutive of, as they speak back to traditional knowledge politics: why does it matter that we think about magic as a conversational, transdisciplinary doing that is rooted in both of our intentions for research? How does putting magic and fat and spirituality into conversation unsettle epistemic divides and help us to weave together different knowledges to build differently responsive words and pedagogies? I think that this, to me, shares an ethic that feels really timely: this idea that we need to constantly put our divergent ideas and focuses into conversation in order to create uneasy alliances or conversations, while also refusing to reconcile or merge these concerns.

Meagan: This brings me to an uncomfortable question: what are the limi-

tations or the questions our work as pedagogists can't answer? We have talked about how post-developmental theorizing challenges some taken-for-granted neoliberal and colonial assumptions and I hope by offering these divergent ways of thinking about moments with children, educators, and the more-than-human we are leaving room for other ways of knowing to enter into dialogue with pedagogical practices. But I am hesitant to conclude that they will. We discussed in the beginning of this paper the specificities of the Canadian context we work in and although I think our relations with magic and fat might open up different conversations that may respond to *some* of the specificities, there are very real, tangible aspects of the lives of Indigenous and historically and continually marginalized Canadians that this work does not answer. For me this acknowledgement is very important. Pretending that the work we do can answer all the questions or *fix* through pedagogy (let alone the lives of humans and more-than-humans in this place) feels like a slip back into offering master narratives.

Pedagogical Conversations and Connections

We approach this conclusion with a specific uneasiness and borrow from Pignarre and Stengers (2011) a resistance to conclude. Like Pignarre and Stengers (2011) we have not answered, nor attempted to answer any of the burning questions that surround how and why pedagogists might practice in certain ways. Instead we have offered our imperfect method as we try to avoid comfortable alliances and resist any imperative to make developmentalism and spirituality and obesity work together to create universalised understandings of children and childhood. Our decision to write this article was born of months of pedagogical conversations, consuming and generative for both of us, but also haunted by simultaneous desires to make visible our shared thinking and to hold close something that has become very dear to us. We have purposefully avoided defining what a pedagogist is in a transferrable or technical sense and instead have activated what pedagogical conversations generate and ask of us in our pedagogist roles. Our unease with this is multiplicitous. We need to be explicit that in our advocacy for situated, localized ways of doing pedagogy, we do not adopt a relativistic, anything goes stance. We make decisions and specifically think beyond developmental psychology, knowing that no decision is ever innocent and that what we choose to do and not do matters to the futures we contribute to (Stengers, 2018). We also worry that our desire to make visible how we think and work together may be interpreted as call for others to engage in pedagogical work in precisely the way we do. This is resolutely not our intention. With this paper we hope to create spaces to enact and invite varied

and situated pedagogies that respond to local contexts, where pedagogies of fats and pedagogies of magic may be taken seriously. Instead of ending with a summation of this 'heart work' we offer an invitation to think with this article beyond reflexivity and critique and instead with an "ecology of partial connections" (Stengers, 2018, p. 127) that requires a way of learning from others that acknowledges that we are transformed by others and indebted to one other. We believe that the value of our, and any pedagogical work, is in its responsiveness to the local worlds it labours to answer to. We also take seriously that our thinking and conversing sometimes fails to answer to some of the questions that we know to be central to the contexts in which we live and work. To 'do' pedagogical conversations then, requires that we trace who we are in dialogue with and that we care for the pedagogical relations that trouble and expand how our ongoing conversations answer to situated lives, precarities, and inheritances.[3]

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