We cannot continue as we are:
The educator in an education for survival

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Abstract

The article takes a broad view, locating discussion about the early years educator in a wider debate about the future of the educator at a time of great crisis, when even the future of the species is in question. The state we are in calls for fundamental review of the purposes and concept of education and, therefore, the values, qualities and practices needed of *all* educators. The article reflects on these subjects, proposing an education for survival, democracy and flourishing and a concept of education in its broadest sense, implying an educator capable of working with diversity and democracy, an ethics of care and encounter, an attitude of research and experimentation and pedagogical approaches to match. The article ends with several linked questions. We need well-educated educators, but what do we gain by the focus on 'professionalism'. Should our focus be on education and the educator: the purpose of the former and the requirements of the latter? If we talk about 'professionalism', does that not risk diverting us from the real task in hand, an education and educators able to respond to the crisis facing us? Might we not end up reconceptualising the concept of professionalism so much to accommodate what is important, such as the idea of multiple knowledges and democratic practice, that we render the concept meaningless?

> There is no single vital problem, but many vital problems, and it is this complex intersolidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrolled processes, and the general crisis of the planet that constitutes the number one vital problem (Morin, 1999: 74)

This article is about the role and responsibility of the educator in the world we are in and the world we can see ahead of us. I realise that this special issue is focused on early childhood workers, and specifically professionalism in early childhood, and I also realise there are important matters particular to this group that urgently need addressing: the scandalous pay and working conditions and inadequate basic and continuing education of many 'childcare workers'; the continuing split in many early childhood workforces between 'childcare workers' and 'teachers'; and the lower pay and status even of early years teachers compared with school teachers (OCED, 2006). All these matters need to be addressed, in the interests of children and workers; they call for a well educated early years educator, qualified to work with children from birth to 6 years and enjoying parity of education, pay and other conditions with school teachers. But faced by the world we are in and entering, now more than ever early childhood and its workforce need to be looked at within the wider context of education and in relation to other parts of the education system.

Early childhood education and care has moved far up the policy agenda in recent years, yet its relationship with the school system and compulsory education has received inadequate attention, too often being relegated to the 'readiness for school' role, ECEC as a sort of seedbed for later growth. More interesting concepts – such as a 'strong and equal partnership' (OECD, 2001) or 'the vision of a pedagogical meeting place' (Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi, 1994) – have been sidelined. The world of 'older childhood' education pays little attention to the innovative thinking and practice to be found in the world of early childhood, assuming the latter to be functional but simple, a means to train children for school. While the situation is compounded by the world of early childhood rarely venturing into the world of 'older childhood', to challenge, contest or just dialogue. Existing

in self-imposed isolation, early childhood education and care is at growing risk of being taken for granted, and worse subsumed into school education – 'schoolification' as some call it.

Important as these reasons are for relating early childhood to the wider educational system, they are not my concern in this article. I want to argue another reason for taking a broad view that locates discussion about the early years educator in a wider debate about the future of the educator. I want to argue that we, humankind, are in a period of such crisis and peril, Edgar Morin's 'number one vital problem', that we must review fundamentally the purposes of all education and, therefore, the values, qualities and practices needed of all educators, whether working with 15 month olds or 15 years old. Of course, there are some differences, some areas of specialism that recognise that 15 month olds and 15 year olds are not equivalent; there is an important debate to be had here about initial education, and the balance to be struck between general and specialised contents for educators. But the macro-task facing all is, I would argue, similar.

This article, therefore, is a reflection about education and educators at a very particular and perilous moment of humankind's history, and what this moment calls for. I will return at the end to the question of professionalism, but only after prolonged consideration of the context within which educators of all kinds are and will be working and what this context means for education. The question of professionalism should, I think, be placed in this wider context and, I will suggest, perhaps be seen as subsidiary to two larger and more critical questions: given the state we, humankind, are in, what is the purpose of education and what are the requirements of the educator?

The state we are in
The world faces a number of huge problems, global in scope (for a further discussion of these issues and some possible implications for education, see Moss, 2008). Some combine both opportunity and danger; others are just plain bad news. Some are modern variants of perennial issues,

evolving in contemporary circumstances and perceptions; a few are specific to our times, exceptional conditions that are the culmination of past developments. Technology and science have been developing for millennia, but it is only recently that computing has emerged as a world-changing phenomenon. Globalisation as a process has a long history, but today it is manifesting as unparalleled deterritorialisation, in which borders increasingly dissolve, whether for communication, pollution, finance or organised crime.

I want, however, to focus on four other global problems: democracy, diversity, justice and potential self-destruction. *Democracy* I take to be a fundamental value and practice, a necessary condition for an effective response to other challenges. Of course, it is not a perfect system, the worst form of government, Churchill said, except for all the others that have been tried; and it can easily wither, democracy, as Dewey observed, needing 'to be reborn in every generation, and education is the midwife'. The need for rebirth is particularly pressing today, both because of the challenges we face, which require responses that emerge from democratic deliberation and decisions, and because of the state democracy is in.

The Nobel prize-winning economist, Joseph Stiglitz, concludes that 'we have failed to develop the democratic political institutions that are required if we are to make globalization work' (Stiglitz, 2006: 276). International organisations – bodies such as OECD, the World Bank, UNESCO - increasingly shape national policies and local practices in fields such as education (think, for example, of OECD's cross-national Programme for International Student Assessment - PISA), yet they lack democratic accountabilit. At national and local levels, democratic politics is hollowing out, appearing incapable of addressing major and complex issues. Citizens appear increasingly disenchanted with the formal institutions and procedures of democratic government, and the politicians who inhabit them. Too many important areas, not least childhood, suffer from the near absence of a vibrant and engaged democratic politics. As Morin observes, we are in the midst

of a draining and sclerosis of traditional politics, incapable of fathoming the new problems that appeal to it; in the midst of a politics that encompasses multi-faceted issues, handling them in compartmentalized, disjointed, and additive ways; and in the midst of a debased politics that lets itself be swallowed by experts, managers, technocrats, econocrats, and so on (Morin, 1999: 112)

Single issue politics provides some evidence of continuing democratic health. Yet it fails to cohere into broader movements that can link values, issues and goals into a broad programme capable of responding to the many problems facing us.

Diversity is central to the human condition and is, too, under threat. Biodiversity is a growing concern. So far, 1.75 million species have been identified out of an estimated 13-14 million. Yet largely due to human impact, species today are disappearing at 50 to 100 times their normal rate and this rate is predicted to rise dramatically: 'it has been argued that the present rate of extinction is sufficient to eliminate most species on the planet Earth within 100 years' (Gaudin, 2008:12-13).

Human diversity at also at risk: diversity of peoples, diversity of ways of life, diversity of perspectives. Despite much talk about the importance of diversity and real progress in removing some forms of discrimination and accepting some differences in ways of life, diversity (or rather valuing and practicing diversity) remains the exception not the norm. Prejudice and discrimination still abound, with racism and homophobia just two of the most obvious examples. But the problem goes deeper, into discourses and ways of thinking that assume and value homogeneity, sameness and closure. As John Gray points out, there is a strong strand of liberal thinking that 'looks to a rational consensus on the best way of life', which he adds 'cannot show us how to live together in societies that harbour many ways of life' (Gray, 2009: 21). Morin (1999) talks of unrelenting processes of standardisation fuelled by what he calls the 'logic of the artificial machine', implanted at an organisational level by 'technoscience'. And as diversity is reduced, so too is complexity:

> The extension of the logic of the artificial machine to every aspect
> of life produces mechanistic and fragmented thinking that takes
> technocratic and econocratic forms. Such thinking perceives only
> mechanical causality while everything increasingly obeys a complex
> causality. It reduces reality to that which is quantifiable…(which
> produces) a blindness to existence, the concrete, and the individual,
> but also to context, the global and the fundamental (Morin, 1999:
> 70)

A field like education (and here early childhood education is much to the fore) can be and is approached from many directions, applying a myriad of perspectives, working with diverse theories and practices. Researchers and practitioners are working with feminist theories, critical theories, postcolonial theories, race theories, queer theories, and poststructural theories; and from each theoretical position, education looks different. Yet, when it comes to policy and practice, it is as if diversity did not exist. International bodies, national government and NGOs vie with each other to re-cycle the same narrow perspectives, the same limited range of research, the same prescriptions and the same (usually implicit) social constructions. Universal laws and practices are propounded, diversity ignored and, therefore, threatened. This totalising view expresses itself in normalising terms such as 'quality', 'best practice', 'evidence based practice' – all of which assume one question, one right answer, and no differences of perspective or interpretation.

Neglect of perspectival diversity cannot be equated with a threatened mass extinction of species; the consequences are not so severe, and people still continue to pursue new perspectives. Yet both are symptomatic of a disregard for diversity and complexity and a will to control and master through normalisation and reductionism.

Prejudice and discrimination contribute greatly to the third problem: *social injustice*. Most obviously inequality remains, and in some cases grows, within and between countries. In 2005, over 3 billion people, 40% of the

world's population, lived on less than US$2 a day,
(http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats), while
the average per capita income of OECD member states (in 2007) was
US$32,200 – US$88 a day. Even among these rich countries, inequality
varies greatly: the income of the richest 20% in the United States is more
than 8 times that of the poorest 20%, compared to less than 4 times in
Norway, Finland and Japan. These income figures can be seen as proxies
for a wide range of other inequalities in vital areas of life: access to basic
amenities, health, housing, education.

Inequality restricts opportunities and stifles human flourishing. It is bad
for well-being. Wilkinson and Pickett show that, for rich countries, 'there is
a very strong tendency for ill-health and social problems to occur less
frequently in the more equal countries…(and to be) more common in
countries with bigger income inequalities. The two are extraordinarily
closely related' (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 19-20). Furthermore,
everyone – from poor to rich – fares less well in unequal societies. But the
consequences of inequality go beyond well-being, they are literally a
matter of life and death. In a world where the poorest 40% of the world's
population accounts for just 5% of global income and the richest 20%
account for three-quarters, 25,000 children die each day due to poverty:
the extreme price of injustice.

What makes this even more tragic is that the scale of inequality not only
leads to untold death and misery at the bottom end of the scale, but there
is not even any commensurate increase in well-being once income passes
a certain level: increases in material living standards in poorer countries
'result in substantial improvements both in objective measures of
wellbeing like life expectancy, and in subjective ones like happiness. But
as nations join the ranks of the affluent developed countries, further rises
in income count for less and less' (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 8). In
short, inequality brings premature death to the poor and unhappiness to
the well-off: 'it is a remarkable paradox that, at the pinnacle of human
material and technical achievement, we find ourselves anxiety-ridden,
prone to depression, worried about how others see us, unsure of our

friendships, driven to consume and with little or no community life…we seek comfort in over-eating, obsessive shopping and spending, or become prey to excessive alcohol, psychoactive medicines and illegal drugs' (ibid.: 3).

The fourth problem, what Morin (1999) terms the *Damoclean threat*, is the very real possibility of the human species self destructing or, at best, causing itself enormous harm. One cause is relatively recent. The destructive capacity of warfare has been increasing since the 19th century, when technology and the ability of nation states to mobilise resources led to the capacity to destroy people and places on a truly industrial scale. But since 1945 we have entered a new phase with nuclear weapons providing the capacity to wipe out the whole species, a possibility growing more likely as nuclear weapons proliferate (leading the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists in 2007 to move their 'doomsday clock' two minutes closer to midnight – it now shows 23.55) (http://www.thebulletin.org/content/doomsday-clock/overview).

The second cause has been growing for longer, but has accelerated in recent years. The collective damage caused to the environment, over the last 200 years, by the growth in material consumption of a minority and the recent vast increase in world population now threatens the very future of our species; it represents a massive failure to act with care, responsibility or foresight. Global warming is already creating serious problems, and will have a catastrophic impact if not limited to 2 degrees centigrade, a target which may well be beyond mankind to achieve. Resource depletion, the UK Government's Chief Scientist has warned, will come to a head in 2030, due to over consumption and population growth, causing a 'perfect storm' of food shortages, scarce water and insufficient energy resources that 'threaten to unleash public unrest, cross-border conflicts and mass migration as people flee from the worst-affected regions' (The Guardian, 18 March 2009). A recent authoritative report paints a stark picture and draws a clear conclusion:

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A world in which things simply go on as usual is already inconceivable. But what about a world in which nine billion people all aspire to the level of affluence achieved in the OECD nations? Such an economy would need to be 15 times the size of this one by 2050 and 40 times bigger by the end of the century. What does such an economy look like? What does it run on? Does it really offer a credible vision for a shared and lasting prosperity? (Jackson, 2009: 6).

The challenge thrown down here is environmental – traditional ideas of growth and prosperity are unattainable. But also moral – what kind of world can combine prosperity not based on growth with equality?

Neoliberalism: the wasted generation

These problems have been gaining momentum and visibility over the last 30 years. Yet this has also been a period when a particular form of capitalism has become increasingly influential, not least in education: market or neoliberal capitalism[i]. That form of capitalism *may* now have peaked, opening space for change, as a result of the recent financial catastrophe, the product of neoliberalism's belief in self-regulating markets, and the irresponsibility, greed and short-sightedness of many who fell thrall to the assumptions and values of neoliberalism's utopian vision. These assumptions and values include: competition; markets and contractual relationships; individual choice; the self-regulating and self-forming autonomous subject; and inequality. Neoliberalism has a deep suspicion of democratic politics and anything public, and a strong preference for private business and property, with governance through markets, managers and technical experts (Moss, 2009). In this system, the social and the political collapse into the economic and managerial, so that 'all aspects of social behaviour are reconceptualised along economic lines' (Rose, 1999: 141) and contentious issues are depoliticised and left to the market and management.

Yet life is never straightforward and simple. Neoliberalism is in tension with more conservative traits. Yet the two can also come together, even

within individuals. Michael Apple, writing about the compulsory education sector in the US (but redolent of both this sector and ECEC in England), has described an alliance – a 'new hegemonic bloc' - of neoliberals and neoconservatives, 'tense and filled with contradictory tendencies' but still capable of exerting leadership in educational policy and reform: the former emphasising the relationship between education and the market, the latter agreeing with the neo-liberal emphasis on the economy, but seeking stronger control over knowledge, morals and values through curricula, testing and other means (Apple, 2004). More generally, Harvey has pointed to 'the increasing authoritarianism evident in neoliberal states such as the US and Britain', equating this authoritarianism with a strain of neoconservatism which is

> entirely consistent with the neoliberal agenda of elite governance, mistrust of democracy, and the maintenance of market freedoms. But it veers away from the principles of pure neoliberalism and has reshaped neoliberal practices in two fundamental respects: first, in its concern for order as an answer to the chaos of individual interests, and second, in its concern for an overweening morality as the necessary social glue to keep the body politic secure in the face of external and internal dangers (Harvey, 2005: 82).

In the field of education, including early childhood, this uneasy relationship has produced in a number of countries - most notably English-speaking ones, which have been most swayed by neoliberalism - a strange mixture of markets and central control (for a fuller discussion of 'governed markets' in ECEC services in England, see Moss, forthcoming). There is an emphasis on both individual choice and strong governing, 'quasi-markets and the evaluative state', all driven by neoliberalism's 'rage for accountability', based on measurability, meeting a reductive need for and belief in simplicity, certainty and objectivity, and pinning its hopes on a 'social science of variables' that claims an accurate, stable and ultimate representation of reality (Lather, 2006). Educators – whether established professionals in schools or aspiring professionals in ECEC – have been re-constituted as technicians or entrepreneurs, as care and

education have been commodified and nurseries and schools have been transformed into businesses selling products to consumers and producing returns on government investment. The task of the educator-as-technician is to apply prescribed human technologies of proven effectiveness ('what works') to produce predetermined outcomes.

The consequences of a generation of growing neoliberal influence on the world have been dire. Neoliberalism has failed to ameliorate the problems facing human kind, indeed has made them worse. Faced by faltering democracy, it has offered markets, management and privatised solutions. Diversity has been valued, but in a very particular form of hyper-individualism and the autonomous subject, helping undermine old solidarities while impeding the creation of new ones. Injustice has thriven, with inequality treated as a necessary driver of competition and growth and the creation of a new class of super-rich managers and entrepreneurs. While the question hanging over our survival, which calls for reduced consumption and global collaboration, has been met by a mythic belief in self-regulating markets, a novelty-driven turbo-consumerism which not only depletes the environment further but produces ever more troubled populations, and the intensification of competition at all levels.

Education and educators in the Damoclean phase

I have belaboured this wider context not to create fear and despondency (though both seem justified), but to emphasise two points. First, we cannot just continue as we are, working for more of the same (only perhaps better): for our condition not only stifles flourishing, but more urgently, it is unsustainable, possibly fatal. This applies as much to debates about education and educators, as to anything else. We have to face the state we are in, ask difficult and critical questions, and consider radical answers. Second, neoliberalism is not dead; it will never go away (its contemporary emergence is a second coming after the dominance of laissez-faire capitalism in the early stages of the industrial revolution (Rose, 1999)) and has tenacious capacities to continue to affect us all, not least in how we think. But it is weakened and thrown into disrepute –

disenchantment is widespread. It has sought to impose a dictatorship of no alternative, and for the moment is back in the barracks in some disgrace. Can the opportunity be taken to re-assert diversity and build new partnerships for creating a world that is more democratic, more genuinely plural, more just and less unequal, and capable of rising to the challenge of survival?

Holding firm to these two points, I want now to focus down on education and educators, though all the time remembering that both are part of a much larger and inter-related context and that deep change in education needs to connect with other discourses and movements: for the renewal of democracy, for diversity in all forms, for social justice, for a sustainable world. I want to consider the role and responsibility of education and educators, and from that what values, qualities and competences they require[ii]. As already said, I take for granted the need for a well educated workforce, with parity across all members.

We need first to ask two critical questions. Given the state we are in, what is the purpose of education? And what do we mean by education? Richard Aldrich argues that 'at the beginning of the twenty-first century it is essential to review the nature and aims of education…in the light of the unprecedented situation in which the human race is placed…(where) our major concern is no longer the origin, rather the death of species – especially our own' (Aldrich, 2009: xx). He considers three purposes of education with deep historical roots: education for salvation, education for the state and education for progress. But then, in the light of the state we find ourselves in today, he proposes a fourth purpose of overriding important today: education for survival.

> The principle aims of education for survival can be briefly stated. The first is that of 'living well' to prevent or reduce the incidence of major catastrophes that threaten human and other species and the Earth itself. The second is to make preparations for survival, in the aftermath of any catastrophes (Aldrich, 2009: yy).

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Building on my earlier analysis, I would add two other purposes, closely related to each other and education for survival. First, education for democracy, for, as Dewey says, education is the midwife needed for the regular renewal of democracy. But I also assume that democracy is a necessary condition for successfully confronting other problems, such as injustice and denial of diversity. Second, education for individual and collective sustainable flourishing, for, as Jackson argues,

> Prosperity consists in our ability to flourish as human beings – within the ecological limits of a finite planet. The challenge for our society is to create the conditions under which this is possible. It is the most urgent task of our times (Jackson, 2009: 5).

In addition to sustainable resource use and emissions and protecting 'critical natural capital', Jackson adds that such flourishing must ensure 'distributional equity' (10). Flourishing means, on the one hand, 'to participate meaningfully and creatively in the life of society', and on the other hand to do so 'in less materialistic ways' (11), which means that 'addressing the social logic of consumerism is also vital' (10). The concept of flourishing and what it might mean, both individually and collectively, needs further dialogue, argumentation and elaboration, and it also overlaps with or is interwoven with survival and democracy. It focuses our thinking on what Sen calls 'capabilities for flourishing', defined 'as a range of 'bounded capabilities' to live well – within certain clearly defined limits' (7).

Where does this leave the relationship of education to the economy? Answers to this question partly depend on ideas about the future, in particular whether after current turbulence, things really can or should revert to where they were in 2007, with economic growth as the main aim and measure of success for individuals and nations alike and competition as the main driver of growth. Many politicians and parents (and a good number of young people) still see the main purpose of education in this light, as contributing to employment and economic growth in an

increasingly competitive global economy, what Fendler succinctly terms 'educating the flexible soul':

> Flexibility is vaunted as the cutting-edge solution to the challenges of productivity in a fast-moving global economy, and the goals and objectives reinscribe the values of flexibility through curricular and pedagogical practices (2001: 120).

This hoped-for 'business as usual' belief must be questioned on two grounds. First, continuing growth based on status competition and novelty-based consumerism is unsustainable and major shifts to a different kind of macro-economic structure based on no consumption growth is necessary for survival (Jackson, 2009). Second, the focus on economic growth has been at the expense of other goals and purposes; we have forgotten that the economy is not an end in itself, but a means to the end of human flourishing: 'a new macro-economics for sustainability must abandon the presumption of growth in material consumption as the basis for economic stability. It will have to be ecologically and socially literate, ending the folly of separating economy from society and environment' (ibid.: 10). So the economic consideration will continue to play an important part in education, but be treated as subservient to other goals and purposes that are more important to the survival of the species and human flourishing.

This means, too, a change in how we think of economic activity. We need to recognise, value and record the large areas of human productive activity that do not pass through the market nor appear in economic statistics – not least the unpaid care work undertaken by billions of children and adults that is vital to the wellbeing of people and planet alike. And we need a profound shift in attitude, from exploitation to gardening:

> During the industrial age, human activities were implicitly understood in terms of production and consumption. Nature was only a source of raw materials and a place to get rid of waste.

If natural life, for the cognitive civilization, is perceived as a key factor for future children survival (sic), the relationship should turn to a symbiosis attitude. Such an evolution means a shift in the mentalities from production to gardening. It assumes that the gardener is more than a producer. She/he is the guardian of life perpetuation, and also a poet modelling life as an artist (Gaudin, 2008: 41).

Gardening the planet replaces economic growth as the 'core mission' for humans – and gardening is not only an economic activity, but an accomplishment, a pleasure and an art (ibid.: 75).

One qualification should be added to this discussion of the purposes of education: to place it in perspective. Education can and should play a role in democracy, diversity, justice and environment. But we should beware of 'mission creep', that tendency to see education (and not least early childhood education) as *the* answer to everything, so avoiding the need to tackle difficult structural problems. Wilkinson and Pickett put the matter bluntly:

If you want to know why one country does better or worse than another, the first thing to look at is the extent of inequality. There is not one policy for reducing inequality in health or the educational performance of school children, and another for raising national standards of performance. Reducing inequality is the best way of doing both (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 30)

If education is for survival, democracy and diversity, what do we mean by education? Here we can envisage a continuum, running from a narrow view at one end, education in its narrowest sense, which equates education with schooling and certain kinds of formal learning focused wholly or mainly on cognitive capacities; through to a broad view at the other end, 'education in its broadest sense', concerned with human and societal flourishing. This concept of education

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understands education as fostering and supporting the general well-being and development of children and young people, and their ability to interact effectively with their environment and to live a good life. This is education as a process of upbringing and increasing participation in the wider society, with the goal that both individual and society flourish (Moss and Haydon, 2008: 2)

This is a holistic education, in which caring (for self, others and the environment) and learning, health and upbringing are viewed as inseparable conditions for flourishing. Learning itself is understood as a process of meaning making, organised around broad thematic areas, the results of which are unpredictable, for as Rinaldi puts it, 'the potential of the child is stunted when the endpoint of their learning is formulated in advance' (Rinaldi, 1993: 104). From this perspective, knowledge is assumed to be perspectival, partial and provisional, and new thought and experimentation are welcomed and valued. Democracy, diversity, social justice and sustainability are basic values; while the (pre)school is a social institution expressing the community's responsibility for its children, and both a public space where citizens encounter each other and a collaborative workshop where many possibilities and projects are created through dialogue and collective choices.

The role and responsibility of the well educated educator in this context is to be

> more attentive to creating possibilities than pursuing predefined goals…[to be] removed from the fallacy of certainties, [assuming instead] responsibility to choose, experiment, discuss, reflect and change, focusing on the organisation of opportunities rather than the anxiety of pursuing outcomes, and maintaining in her work the pleasure of amazement and wonder" *(*Fortunati, 2006: 34, 36)

What does this mean for the values, qualities and competencies of the educator, and so by implication for the education of educators? Rather than embodying and re-producing a body of professional knowledge, the

educator needs to start from acknowledging the multiplicity of paradigms, the diversity of knowledges and the plurality of values that exist in the world. The educator needs to appreciate the range of disciplines, theories and practices available, and to understand her or his responsibility to decide where to situate themselves in this complex and diverse range of possibilities: perspective can be a choice, it need not be a necessity. In short, the educator cannot look to a profession to provide an objectively true body of knowledge. Rather to be professional means being able to construct knowledge from diverse sources, involving awareness of paradigmatic plurality, curiosity, and border crossing, and acknowledging that knowledge is always partial, perspectival and provisional.

The educator must also be willing to work with – indeed embrace -complexity and, the inevitable companion of diversity and complexity, uncertainty (Urban, 2007). Morin sums this up as 'thinking in context' and 'thinking the complex',

> A multidimensional thinking…a thinking that recognizes its incompleteness, and can deal with uncertainty, the unforeseen, interdependencies…discontinuity, nonlinearity, disequilibrium, "chaotic" behaviour, and bifurcations (Morin, 1999: 130-131).

It is also thinking that can break free of overspecialisation and compartmentalisation, in search of new perspectives and new connections.

The educator needs to value and practice democracy, which in the words of Paulo Freire involves offering her or his 'reading of the world', but recognising that the educator's role is to 'bring out the fact that there are other readings of the world' at times in opposition to the educator's own (Freire, 2004: 96). For democracy implies diversity – of interests, of ideas and of perspectives – and 'needs conflicts between ideas and opinions in order to be alive and productive' (Morin, 1999: 90). Rather than a subject to be taught, democracy is an everyday practice, a way of relating, 'a way of personal life controlled not merely by faith in human nature in general

but by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished' (Dewey, 1939: 2).

The educator needs to work with an ethics of care and the ethics of an encounter. Joan Tronto describes an ethics of care as involving particular acts of caring and a general habit of mind, that should inform all aspects of life, and which includes attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. She defines caring as 'a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our "world" so we can live in it as well as possible' (Tronto, 1993: 103), broadening the concept to include our relationship with the environment as well as with people.

The ethics of an encounter attempts to counter a Western tradition of 'grasping' the other to make the other into the same, with respect for the absolute alterity of the Other, the Other's absolute otherness or singularity: this is an Other whom I cannot represent and classify into a category, whom I cannot seek to understand by imposing my framework of thought. This means I have to abandon the security and certainty that comes from making the Other into the Same. Dahlberg has outlined the enormous implications of this ethics for education:

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

Responsibility is an important part of both ethics, essentially concerned as they are with relationships, including responsibility for others and for the environment. The period of neoliberal dominance that has culminated in the near implosion of the financial system dragging down economies throughout the world has been termed the 'age of irresponsibility' by

Jackson (2009) who speaks of the 'long-term blindness to the limitations of the material world', the irresponsibility of thoughtless growth putting the environment under ever greater pressure. But we can see the irresponsibility of this age expressed, too, in the reckless behaviour of the financial system, selling mortgages to those unlikely to repay them then shifting responsibility for those mortgages to others through CDOs and other exotic products.

The educator as envisaged here needs a certain attitude of mind that desires to research and experiment. For if education is not a process of applying technologies to reproduce predetermined outcomes, it needs to be open to new thought, new theories, new practices. If the purposes of education are survival, democracy and flourishing, there must be constant exploration of what this might mean in practice and the different ways in which these goals can be successfully pursued within diverse contexts.

The educator needs to adopt pedagogical approaches and practices that support the purposes of education, the values of diversity and democracy, the ethics of care and encounter and an attitude of researching and experimenting. Examples abound. Biesta and Osberg, for example, contest the long-established 'representational epistemology' that, they argue, the modern school is still organised around: 'modern schooling has mostly been about getting the child to understand a pre-existing world' (Osberg and Biesta, 2007: 31). In its stead, they propose an epistemology of emergence', in which emergence is defied as 'the creation of new properties'. This 'complexity inspired epistemology' suggests a 'pedagogy of invention', that assumes 'that knowledge does not bring us closer to what is already present but, rather, moves us into a new reality which is incalculable from what came before…Knowledge, in other words, is not conservative, but radically inventionalistic' (ibid.: 46). They argue further that two purposes of school are 'to teach the young how to take care of the world' and 'to facilitate the emergence of human subjectivity' – which might be equated to education for survival and human flourishing:

We educate the young about the world that is and the world that has been precisely because we care about and wish to take responsibility for the future, the world that will emerge….We teach so that children can become better human beings. Both these functions of schooling are intimately connected with the concept of emergence, the emergence of the world on the one hand and the emergence of human subjectivity on the other…It is misguided to think of schools as places where the rules of the past are taught *in order to take care of the future.* Such an attitude succeeds only in replicating the past and holding the world still (ibid.: 47).

Osberg and Biesta are referring to compulsory schooling. But there are many similarities to these ideas in the pedagogical approaches adopted in some early childhood projects: for example, the pedagogy of listening and the important role of aesthetic dimensions in Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi, 2006; Vecchi, forthcoming 2010); and the work undertaken in Swedish preschools by Liselott Mariett Olsson and preschool teachers inspired by the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, with its emphasis on movement and experimentation in learning and its desire to break free from the idea of learning as tameable, predictable, and possible to plan, supervise and evaluate against predetermined standards (Olsson, 2009).

We can also go to these and other early childhood sources to see some of the tools and practices that can support such pedagogical work, including: *project work* which 'grows in many directions without an overall ordering principle, challenging the mainstream idea of knowledge acquisition as a form of linear progression, where the metaphor is the tree' (Rinaldi, 2006: 7); *ateliers and atelieristas* as central players in learning, fostering 'sensibility and the ability for connecting things far removed from each other' and hence learning 'which takes place through new connections between disparate elements'; and *pedagogical documentation*, 'an extraordinary tool for dialogue, for exchange, for sharing… (giving) the possibility to discuss and dialogue "everything with everyone"', and able to contribute to research, evaluation, professional development, planning and democratic politics.

The struggle for self control

The report to the European Commission on 'The world in 2025' pulls no punches. It adds another warning that we cannot carry on as we have been without putting the future of our species at risk. If we do, if the globalization of a market economy and excessive consumption continues and spreads even further, 'it appears to lead to global collapse', even perhaps another episode of mass extinction, this time including humankind. The report offers a second scenario: instead of mankind trying to control the planet, mankind manages to exert self control, after the 'industrial age gave the illusion that mankind could master the world without mastering itself' (Gaudin, 2008: 88).

Self control has, perhaps, a bad image in these days of rampant consumerism and individual choice. Yet 'these days' do not lead to human or planetary flourishing, and self control could open the way to better, happier and more fulfilling lives and environments. While we must not ignore the need to properly value the work of all educators, and especially those in the early childhood field who are currently treated as second-class workers, we must not allow this proper concern to distract us from much wider questions and debates about the future direction for educators and education and their place in the desperate search for survival and flourishing amid the gathering darkness. Just as the planet and its human population cannot take more of the same, neither can education; the educator needs to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

It is in this context that I struggle with the theme of this issue: professionalism in early childhood. Mathias Urban has proposed a paradigm of professionalism that turns away from the traditional and hierarchical concept of embodying an agreed body of knowledge, a sort of professional 'regime of truth'. He argues instead for an 'alternative paradigm of a relational, systemic professionalism that embraces openness and uncertainty, and encourages co-construction of professional knowledges and practices'. Oberhuemer also argues for a radical change,

proposing a democratic professionalism 'based on participatory relationships and alliances…collaborative, cooperative action between professional colleagues and other stakeholders'. Both seem to me consistent with my argument of what educators need to be given the state of the world.

But I am left wondering what we gain by the focus on 'professionalism' - apart from the possibility of enhanced status and conditions (not to be readily dismissed), and the prospect (to be ardently supported) of fending off the reduction of the educator to technician status. Should our focus rather be on education and the educator: the purpose of the former and the requirements of the latter? If we talk about 'professionalism', might that not be a distraction that risks diverting us from the real task in hand, an education and educators able to respond to the huge challenges facing us? How dependent is achieving a well educated educator on the achievement of recognised professional status? In an attempt to critically reinvent professionalism for educators, might we not end up reconceptualising the concept of professionalism so much to accommodate what is important, such as the idea of multiple knowledges and democratic practice, that we render the concept meaningless? Are complex occupations located in human services and informed by social sciences, e.g. educators, fundamentally different (though not inferior) to those that deal with the physical world and are informed by natural sciences, and for whom the idea of a 'professional body of knowledge' may have some meaning, e.g. doctors, engineers?

As I have said throughout, the need for well-educated educators – whether in early childhood services, compulsory schooling and later – enjoying parity of pay and status should not be at issue. What we need, I think, is to focus our attention on what 'well-educated' signifies and the responsibilities of the educator and education in the state we find ourselves in today. Perhaps it is time to move beyond 'professionalism'.

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[i] In emphasising the impact of a particular form of capitalism, it is important to recognise that capitalism takes many forms, each with different consequences and also to avoid what Gibson-Graham (2006) term 'capitalocentric' thinking, which treats capitalism as the only existing form of economic relationships, giving it greater prominence that it merits in a world where they are many examples of other forms of relationship.

[ii] I define 'competencies' not as reaching certain predefined standards of performance; but (in the words of an OECD report) as 'the ability to meet complex demands in a particular context … (implying) the mobilization of knowledge, cognitive and practice skills … as well as attitudes, emotions, values and motivations .. .a holistic notion, that was not synonymous with "skill"' (http://www.portal-stat.admin.ch/deseco/deseco_finalreport_summary.pdf). For a fuller discussion of different concepts of competence, see Cameron, 2008.