

Commentaries and conversations on Jeanette Rhedding-Jones's 'Monocultural constructs'

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Introduction

Transnational Curriculum Inquiry (TCI) is both a site for transnational scholarly conversations and a site for inquiry into the ways that electronic publishing procedures facilitate and/or constrain inclusive knowledge work in global virtual spaces.

One of the ways in which we try to produce such conversations is by keeping *TCI*'s editorial policies and procedures flexible and refraining from imposing arbitrary standards and styles. For example, *TCI* does not have a fixed publication schedule: articles and book/media reviews will usually be published as soon as they are accepted for publication. Some issues might consist of just one article or one book/media review, other issues might contain several articles that we believe might be complementary. We will also be flexible in matters of layout and style. If authors go to the trouble of formatting their articles in a particular way, we will not change them to fit our templates. Similarly, we do not prescribe one single citation style. Authors are free to use whatever style they see as most appropriate for their work, provided that they use a style consistently and provide all of the bibliographic information we require.

TCI's review policies and procedures are also flexible. For example, although all articles published in *TCI* will be peer reviewed, they will not necessarily be 'blind' reviews. Authors can choose to anonymise their manuscripts, and the editors will respect their choice, but we will not impose anonymity on authors.

Each manuscript is normally reviewed by three referees, two of whom, in most circumstances, will be of different nationalities from the author(s) and from each other. In addition, the Editor may assign a consulting editor to liaise with the referees and the Editor in reaching a decision about publication. Each referee's signed review will be circulated to the other referees. My experience, like that of many other journal editors, is that signed reviews are generally of a higher quality than unsigned reviews. However, the names of referees will not be divulged to authors of rejected manuscripts.

Although *TCI* publishes principally in English, we encourage co-publication of manuscripts in the author's 'home' language, if this is other than English. I thank Francisco Sousa for providing his article on curriculum work in The Azores in both English and Portuguese.

At the Editor's discretion, manuscripts accepted for publication may be published together with some or all of the referees' reports and the author's response, as is the case with Jeanette Rhedding-Jones's article in this issue.

I thank Jeanette Rhedding-Jones and Loshini Naidoo for their patience, and also thank Jyotsna Pattnaik and Marg Sellers for their thoughtful and engaging commentaries and questions.

Monad, nomad: where to with this poststructuralist philosophising? An open letter to Jeanette Rhedding-Jones

Marg Sellers

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Dear Jeanette

Your article has inspired me to respond in a letter to you, partly because you have alerted me to recesses of monoculturalisms that lurk in my thinking; partly because like you and others (for example, Richardson, 2000, St. Pierre, 2004) I like to let my writing unfold in Deleuzian (1987) ways, and partly to disrupt any monocultural expectations of this review of your article. An epistolary exchange eases my dis/un/covering of what may be enfolded within pleats, and enhances the pleasure of flowing with/through academic ideas and the spaces they appear in. Similarly to you, I read through feminist poststructuralist lenses and am open to simultaneity of monoculturalism(s) and cultural multiplicity. I know little of postcolonial theory although I am aware that the 'post' confronts colonisation poststructurally and this allows me a glimpse into the territory.

I write from Aotearoa New Zealand,¹ very close to your native Australia but far from your current home in Norway. Although we are distanced geographically, we appear close philosophically and theoretically, although my cultural relativities are different – I live in my homeland, and am of the majority Pakeha² culture. I have been involved as teacher and parent in a variety of early childhood settings over the years and currently work as a teacher educator, of early childhood student teachers.

Before beginning, I will explain briefly the *didaktik* educational perspective that backgrounds my response to your article. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi³ signifies a commitment to a bicultural society; also, we have two official languages, Māori⁴ and English. Drawing from *tikanga Māori*,⁵ the philosophy of our unique, national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), meaning a woven mat, uses the metaphor of weaving to bring together four principles (empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships) and five strands (well-being, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration). Māori perspectives of these principles and strands, while being a separate part of the curriculum document, are integrally related – the weaving of the mat includes a bicultural perspective involving language, culture and values of Māori and Pakeha, an antiracist approach and respectful, reciprocal relationships between both peoples. Margaret Carr and Helen May (1993), who were actively

¹ Aotearoa New Zealand acknowledges biculturalism. Aotearoa is the name given by indigenous Māori to the land that Europeans (re)named New Zealand.

² Pakeha refers to citizens who are non-Māori and of European extraction.

³ This document was signed in 1840 by Māori and representatives of the Crown. It had three objectives: 'the protection of Māori interests, the promotion of settler interests, and the securement of strategic advantage for the Crown' (Durie, M. 1998, *Te mana, te kāwanatanga: The politics of Māori self-determination*, Oxford University Press, [N.Z.]. p. 176).

⁴ Colonisation almost destroyed Māori language. Today, a minority of Māori are fluent in *te reo* (the language) and very few Pakeha speak *te reo*, although the rise in the 1980s of *Kaupapa Māori* schooling, which immerses children in *te reo* and *tikanga Māori*, has contributed to a renaissance and increasing fluency.

⁵ Māori culture, that is, all things Māori.



involved in its development, explain that *Te Whāriki* 'attempts to protect diversity and quality, to provide direction without prescription, and to be helpful to a wide range of age groups, communities, cultures and philosophies' (p. 17). Also, every centre is able to metaphorically weave its own curriculum mat, to incorporate the patterns, features and contexts unique to its programme and to its community of families and children.

Considering your challenge to monocultural thinking, this may sound too good to be true, and in some ways it is. Although the final draft of *Te Whāriki* presented to the Ministry of Education involved extensive consultation with a culturally diverse group of practitioners, tertiary early childhood educators and people with nationally recognised expertise, the Ministry's revised draft – by people not involved in early childhood education – attempted to integrate difference but actually lessened the emphasis on diverse curriculum contexts, such as Pacific Islands settings. However, eight years on, we now have Samoan and Cook Islands Māori early childhood curriculum documents, similar to *Te Whāriki*, and curriculum documents for Tongan and Tokelau cultural settings are in process. Although these all include strands that are important to the cultures they represent, they remain constrained by monocultural values. For example, the Ministry selected one person to write the Samoan curriculum, thus denying the collective voice that is integral to *Fa'asamoa*.⁶ As well, in practice, how centres weave their curriculum mats is very much influenced by achievement expectations in the form of learning outcomes that are based on Western developmental ideals, although this is mediated somewhat by the focus on language immersion in *Te Kohanga Reo* (Māori language nests) and the different Pacific Islands centres.

But, complexity arises in the form of a dilemma that appears similar for minority children in Oslo. A dilemma emanates from needing and/or wanting to learn the majority language to communicate *and* having to learn new ways of operating so as to progress educationally and economically in mainstream Norway/Aotearoa New Zealand *and* the associated loss of cultural identity when the home language is relegated to second place *and* risking losing the home language and access to the culture *and* knowing how this impacts on children's learning, both short- and long-term. Yet, if all these were articulated positively, educating our young children could be very different. From an alternative perspective, learning other languages, learning protocols of other cultures and nurturing individual children's home language and culture need not create problems for minorities. Rather, all these could be seen to enrich all cultures involved.

At this moment, I am reminded of Sonia Nieto's (1999) question, 'Who does the accommodating?' (p.77ff) when such dilemmas arise. As you say, Jeanette, making the majority monocultural perspective (with its associated values and beliefs) the problem, rather than minority multiculturalism(s) is challenging. You ask: 'Do dominant culture professionals hear, see and taste only their own cultural positionings?' (p.6). From my conversations with students and teachers (both early childhood and teacher educators), it appears that most find it difficult to think beyond the Western psychological emphasis on independence, for example, that perceives certain kinds of developmental stages and achievement expectations. So even in mainstream settings, weaving the mat of *Te Whāriki* is relatively unaccommodating of diverse experiences of a critical multiculturalist approach that you present. As you suggest, mono-encultured teachers in any setting need to be asking questions like: 'Whose songs are we singing? Whose sleep patterns are being followed? Whose home does our centre look like, and whose does it not?' (p.7). Another significant question that I agree would do well to be foregrounded, and reflected upon regularly, is: 'What happens when the dominant culture

⁶ The Samoan culture



wants to stop a minority culture's normalized practices, on the basis of majority ethics?' (p.10). Throughout your article, questions such as those above alerted me to mono/multi/culturalist concepts that operate through many areas – societal, institutional, personal and collective – which lead me to reflect on what my mono-encultured gaze might be missing.

Within the Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education scene, we invest much time and effort attempting to consult and collaborate with a diverse range of people, cultures and people with various expertise around any given situation or event. This collaborative approach is one that Pakeha have had to learn and are still grappling with in many instances. It honours Māori protocol and aligns with some, but not all, Pacific Peoples' cultural expectations. So it was puzzling for me to see you write: 'Subverting the established order, of Norwegian pre-school pedagogies highly emphasising social collaboration for example, involves importing other pedagogies, from the home countries and nations of the relocated' (p.24). Doesn't collaboration enable a mono/multi hybridity of cultural pedagogies and curriculum? I'm confused. Here I was, (un)comfortably focussing on *Te Whāriki*'s strands of well-being, belonging, contribution and communication, all of which seem to enable inclusiveness. But you challenge me to (re)think my mono-encultured inclusive perspective – by reflecting on the Norwegian context, and, by acknowledging my admission that not all Pacific Peoples value collaboration to the same extent. If I think too big, it seems too hard – how can we be all things to everyone at once? Yet, if I think about the importance of knowing the students that I am working with at any moment and understanding what is important to their home culture, then it does become possible – through personal interactions. And, I envisage this to be similar for early childhood teachers as they interact with young children from diverse cultures. It's around the personal that there are readily accessible opportunities for change.

Like Nieto (1999), you point to the importance of change occurring through/within/ between/among societal and institutional and personal and collective systems and behaviours if we are to develop early childhood learning communities that nurture multiculturalism(s). Also, that it is in the interplay between the personal and the institutional, for example, that transformation is more likely to occur; within spaces where each is embodied in and emerges from the other(s). This resonates in your ideas about mono/multi/culturalism(s) as an emergence of a 'conglomerate singularity' when you write:

Far from being a negative description of a culture, the mono effects here are new blendings, shifts and transformations. Theorising a contemporary shift to a collective singularity rather than a unitary singularity allows for diversities within it. (p.20)

In reference to Derrida, you say that both the mono and the multi matters, and that from this idea other possibilities emerge. Deleuze (re)appears as you consider the complexity of his philosophical *monad* – within the finiteness of its own existence is expressed the infinity of the entire world – and the implications for theorising culture. You say: 'This monad then, is what I am calling the monocultural, representing and reflecting other monocultures, which themselves function similarly' (p.21). When you talk of cultures 'produc[ing] clarity from obscurity and then plung[ing] back into obscurity' (p.21), it is like appearing in another of Deleuze's *nomadic* spaces, there to dis/un/cover cultural change and flow and dissolution. As shadows and light appear within a landscape, so a collective mono shines as multi before fading into mono, and reappearing as multi elsewhere, and so on. Monad, nomad: where to with this poststructuralist philosophising?



Perhaps not much further for now if this letter is to be of value. I read your article, hopefully as you intended, as being about discourses constructing curriculum (p.8) and I have reflected on some of them. There isn't space here to explore directly how your discussions of globalization and race, ethnicity and culture, language and self, and postnationalism and transnationalism relate to *Te Whāriki* and what it represents, although some intersecting issues appear in my reflecting. As I look through the jottings I made on your article as I read it, there is more that I could respond to. Monocultural assumptions and the implications for assessment of young children's learning, and Aotearoa New Zealand's strategies for increasing the numbers of qualified Māori and Pacific Islands early childhood teachers are two examples.

I am heartened that your final observations about beginnings of changes are echoed in Aotearoa New Zealand. Here, I see teachers letting go of the need for control as they work co-constructively with young children towards shared understandings of knowledge; I hear more encouragement of children using their home language; I see assessment occurring through learning stories that do not focus on measurement. But despite *Te Whāriki* and the potential for weaving multiculturalist mats, a focus on planned learning experiences gets in the way of 'letting learning and play and communications look after themselves' (p.26). If there is an established order to be subverted here, perhaps it is the primacy given to planning that is overly directive and sabotages flows of learning, play and communications. But how do I know that this is not my mono-encultured voice speaking? I would be interested in your response.

In the meantime, thank you, Jeanette, for the inspiration to reflect on monoculturalism(s) and reconsider my critical multi-culturalist perspective.

Yours truly

Marg Sellers

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Reviewer

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A reply to Marg Sellers

Jeanette Rhedding-Jones

Lovely to get a reader out there who thinks about these things too. My tardy response is simply overwork, and the ever-present need to prioritize the local. Yes, I know something of Aotearoa's practices and have been working with a copy of *Te Whāriki* almost since it was published. I will be going to the late November 2006 conference *Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education*, led by Jenny Ritchie in Rotorua. Many of my Norwegian colleagues in early childhood education will be there presenting too: the theme is decolonizing and anti-colonial research and practice. <http://reconece.org>

Thanks too for your reference list: very useful. I think there are big differences between a nation such as Norway and a nation such as New Zealand. Also I'm against the rhetoric of 'enriching all cultures', as this can get passed off as a glib statement. My sentence about 'importing other pedagogies from the home countries and nations of the relocated' is challenging I know. In an Islamic context, such as where I work one day a week with Muslim children, it means the children not drawing people: making geometric designs instead, or depicting birds and flowers. Quite a challenge for my monocultural background of curriculum/care practice with the very young. Yes, in theory, a mono-multi hybridity is what's desired; but where is social competence when what is wanted might not be shared play with other children but individual skills in folding small pieces of paper? The desired social competence of Norwegian pedagogy is a Norwegian construct, based on Norwegian notions of liberty and democracy.

As I see discourses of 'goodness' we can never get it right. The notion of the good teacher, the good curriculum, good parenting and the good/quality institution is an essentialist fabrication culturally contrived. All we can do I think is keep on being critical of how we position ourselves, and be open to difference as the not-me. Yes there is hope when things change; it is possible to let go and to work together for something else; and there are more languages around at least in Oslo than there were when I originally write this piece in 2000. But the mono always asserts itself because that's how monads operate (Deleuze, 1993). We have to watch for it.



A review of 'Monocultural constructs'

Jyotsna Pattnaik

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The article is written very well. I agree with the author's theoretical stand and fully support the need for post-colonial perspectives in early childhood education. The concerns voiced by the author (in reference to Norwegian Early Childhood Education discourses and practices) echo on the other side of the Atlantic as well. Early childhood reconceptualists in the United States such as Canella, Soto, Viruru, have vehemently criticized the canonization of western child development theories in early childhood education and adoption of NAEYC's 'developmentally appropriate practices' (DAPs) by states, national, and local bodies to define quality practices in early childhood classrooms. Criticisms are mounting (both by proponents and opponents of multicultural education) against the widely practiced tourist multiculturalism in the US public schools. With a social reconstruction agenda in mind, critical theories (such as critical multiculturalism, critical race theory, and critical pedagogy) are taking center stage in academic discourses on pluralism at present. Therefore, perspectives presented by minority scholars, hopefully, will lead toward disrupting majority discourses and unsettling majority codes.

I have a few suggestions/perspectives that I present here.

1. While theoretical justifications and perspectives are well articulated, there seems to be some gap in connecting these discussions to the practical/day-to-day practices in early childhood settings. Theoretical discussions have been left abruptly without providing examples related to early childhood curriculum practices so as to demonstrate concrete applications. For example, how do teachers/carers simultaneously reconstruct monoculturalism and cultural multiplicity within an early childhood curriculum?
2. The notion of 'multiplicity' is not without its discontent and has faced many implementational challenges. For example, in what ways may a feminist educator address gender equity in his/her early childhood classroom while not distancing families whose cultural and religious affiliations preach against such an ideal?
3. It is true that teachers' multilingual competence plays a major role in facilitating communication with immigrant children and parents. However, how many languages could a teacher/carer possibly learn if a classroom consists of immigrant children from many different linguistic communities? Learning a language in adulthood is a difficult endeavor unless one is immersed within a particular language-speaking community for an extended period. Therefore, we may need to look beyond teachers to school/center-wide policies that facilitate utilization of bi/multilingual interpreters in linguistically diverse early childhood programs. Mandating second language learning for all children in schools may also help prepare future bi/multilingual teachers.
4. The perspectives and roles of immigrant parents and communities need to be incorporated in discourses surrounding monolingual and monocultural curriculum practices in schools. Utilitarian considerations, frequently, determine parental preference for monocultural/monolingual schooling for their children. Therefore, immigrant parents may not challenge schools' policies that devalue (through a tourist curriculum) or entirely ignore their home language and culture. Parents' preference for English-only instruction and rejection of



bilingual education in California (that resulted in proposition 227, English-only instruction) is a case in point. Parental preference for English-medium instruction has resulted in mushrooming of English-medium private pre/schools (many of which are of questionable quality) in South Asia. Linguists in India lament over the loss of Indian languages as a result of global monopoly of English. Children are graduating from English-medium private schools without acquiring literacy in their mother tongues.

5. Many researchers perceive 'the trait approach' (that defines children's development, learning, and behavior on the basis of their ethnic membership) as reductive and a simplistic explanation that ignores people's varied participation that change over time and space and through contact and relationship with other communities and systems. From their research, Orellana and Bowmen (2004) and McNeil (1999) highlight within-ethnic group differences (in socializations, adaptation pattern etc.) and categorize people as cultural retainers or cultural non-retainers. A host of factors such as phenotypic markers; languages and or language preferences; immigration status; country of origin and regions of origin (urban/rural); generational status; current and past social class positioning; nature and frequency of contact with home countries; and other cultural practices including religion, celebrations, and cultural customs contribute to variations in experiences among immigrants. Explorations of such variations is a complex endeavor and call for embracing a philosophy of 'emergent curriculum' that emerges with the needs and interests of individual children rather than adopting a normative curriculum based on ethnic learning traits and culturally appropriate curriculum.
6. The issues of social class did not surface in the author's discussion. To many critical theorists, multiculturalists have focused primarily on the understandings of asymmetrical gender and ethnic relations and neglected the issues of class struggle. According to Peter McLaren, postmodernist critique may reproduce the very bourgeois structures of signification that it attempts to contest. Some may claim that social class, gender, race, and ethnicity are so deeply mutually implicated that class issues pervade all discourse on gender, race, and ethnicity. However, as rightly pointed out by Ortner that the pervasiveness and hiddenness of class frequently makes it muted and unavailable for discourse and subordinated to other discourses on marginalization. Global capitalism has contributed to the division of immigrant communities on the basis of their income. Therefore, immigrant children's experiences with curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices may vary depending on their parental income, their place of residence, and the school that they attend.

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A response to Jyotsna Pattnaik

Jeanette Rhedding-Jones

I have numbered my comments to match the 7 points made by Jyotsna Pattnaik. Yes, we seem to be reading and thinking in related directions to each other. In particular, people around me in early childhood education in Norway are now talking and writing about developmental psychology and its effects. How majority discourses are disrupted is a critical issue in pluralism.

1. I know there is a gap in my paper between connecting what I say as theories to everyday practices. In part this is caused by a word length problem. But also I have published about practices elsewhere; and I am more concerned right now with influencing the thinking and political actions of the people around me than with demonstrating that I know about practice. In the chapter I have written for Amos Hatch's new USA book *Early Childhood Qualitative Research* (2007) I write about seven of 'my' graduate students and how they are dealing with how teacher carers simultaneously construct the mono and the multi. Also in my own writing, together with Muslim women in a range of languages, we are trying to say what happens in practice with the children aged 1-6 in a five section kindergarten in central Oslo. For my questioning of diversity see my chapter (2005) In Nicola Yelland's edited book by Open University Press: *Critical Issues in Early Childhood*.
2. Yes there is a problem when feminist and multicultural ideals and ideas clash. My colleague (Becher, 2004) has published about this on CIEC (www.wwords.co.uk/ciec) as a series of vignettes. Male violence is a case in point. She advises that feminism takes a back seat when other matters are more crucial. In my own case, after migration, I began to see gender equity as not the only practice that matters.
3. It's not a matter of how many languages a teacher can understand or speak. What matters I think is that these languages are heard and used, even if 'we' are not central to what happens. The women I work with as carers, assistants and pedagogues with the very young all speak at least three languages, not the same as each other, and use them every day with the children. The common languages are Arabic and Norwegian, and I understand only Norwegian. That doesn't seem to matter. It's the mono mentality that is the problem in institutions where this is not happening. This is because so-called integration operates as assimilation. Having a transformative agenda makes a world of difference.
4. Yes, the perspectives and roles of immigrant parents and communities need to be incorporated into discourses surrounding monolingual and monocultural curriculum practices. Easier said than done. I've used the term 'monocultural' to shock people into an awareness of how things operate. It's a resistance of the 'multicultural' as a now normalized focus or aspiration or policy. It's to show how the mono keeps coming back in, and how it's there even if we are trying as much as we can to do the multi. It's not only linguists in India who are lamenting the loss of Indian languages: it's a global process of take-over which we Anglophones have to constantly work at avoiding. One of the reasons



why I am so slow in fixing up this article for publication is my desire to work with the immigrant Norwegians who won't be reading it.

5. 'The trait approach' defining children's development, learning and behaviour: yes, as you can see I am working against this too. Normative curriculum is unfair, unjust and inappropriate. Psychology and its power has much to answer for. I have a paper about this (written as veiled text by my scribing of it as a play for theatre performance). It's called 'The OECD and the nation of expert in ECE: a play'. It's on <http://reconcece.org> as fully published conference proceedings from Arizona 2003. I usually leave it off my CV.
6. Social class: I agree with your comments and will work at this point. Thanks. I do 'have' a graduate student who is doing women teachers' life histories in relation to social class as her project. I quote her by name (Bente Lande Lyngstad) in my forthcoming chapter in the Hatch edited book I name above. Earlier analyses of social class left off the education of families, in particular mothers' lack of higher education. For immigrants in relative poverty, compared to the majority around them, the lack of family/women's cultural capital as higher education and as spendable money is critical. So children's social class location follows, even if the word 'class' is unspeakable. For dominant cultures in affluent nations such as Norway (now Oslo is named the most expensive city on the world to live in) the monocultural makes inaudible the financial differences between the kindergarten assistants, for example, and the parents of the mainstream Norwegian children without immigrant backgrounds from non-Western nations.

Afterword

There are now two books forthcoming as effects of a development project (2005-2008). These regard some of the critical issues I raise in what I have written as my 2000 conference paper, now rewritten for *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry*; and what I say as responses to the two named reviewers. I thank Noel Gough for the unique process of publication here, which allows the forthcoming books to be stronger.

Rhedding-Jones, J., Nordli, H., Tanveer, J., Dhoski, S., Abdellaoui, N., Djelassi, M., Karaman, S. and Ibrahim S. (2008 forthcoming) *Fortellinger fra en muslimsk barnehage* (Stories from a Muslim preschool in Norway). Bergen Norway: Fagbokforlaget.
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