CHAPTER 9

Marketisation, Elite Education and Internationalisation in Australian Early Childhood Education and Care

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Introduction

The "study of elites and elite education is a perpetually emerging field of research" (Howard and Kenway 2015: 1007) and not more so than in the field of early childhood education. In taking up Howard and Kenway's exhortation for research to be undertaken on "elite institutions for the very young" (Howard and Kenway 2015: 1007), we ask: how might internationalisation and elite education be understood in relation to children's

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early childhood education and care (ECEC), in particular, in the highly marketised Australian childcare sector?

Australia's highly privatised childcare sector provides a rich site for interrogating how internationalisation and elite education might be manifest in an early childhood market. To examine these issues, we turn to the writings of researchers and scholars of internationalisation and elite education in the school and tertiary education sectors to provide a framework for considering the applicability of these concepts to ECEC (Howard and Kenway 2015; Knight 2008; Maxwell and Aggelton 2013; Prosser 2016).

We concur with Mierendorff, Ernst and Mader (in Chap. 8 of this volume) that internationalisation and elite education assume particular forms within ECEC settings that are distinct from schools and higher education, distinctions that are driven primarily by the very young ages of the children who attend such settings, and the non-compulsory nature of children's attendance. For these reasons, the relationship between elite education and internationalisation, often portrayed as symbiotic or interlinked in schools and higher education, is also not as pronounced in ECEC. In the context of ECEC, these studies are emergent, with little done in the way of empirical research or context-specific theorising. Yet, the growing interest in early childhood education globally from an expanding range of stakeholders suggests such enquiries are both relevant and timely.

Drawing upon our own and others' previous research and scholarship on the creation of an Australian childcare market (Newberry and Brennan 2013; Press and Woodrow 2005, 2009; Woodrow and Press 2007; Sumsion 2012) and the history of ECEC in Australia (Press and Wong 2013, 2015, 2016), we consider the possible manifestations of elite education and internationalisation in ECEC. We ask whether the rise of private, for-profit childcare has resulted in an elite early childhood education market. In doing so, we examine the way in which the discourses of childcare adopted by the market are increasingly linked to middle-class parental aspirations for their children. We tentatively "test" the reality of an elite market in early childhood education, by examining the rhetorical promise of a number of childcare providers against the quality ratings provided by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)—a statutory body which assesses all Australian ECEC services. We reflect on the applicability of internationalisation to ECEC through two lenses: firstly, in relation to institutionally framed intercultural practices, and secondly, in relation to globalisation and the related processes of movement and flows of people, ideas and capital, and the

creation and penetration of international markets. We conclude by drawing on preliminary findings from these explorations to suggest potentially productive future lines of enquiry.

We commence with an overview of the Australian early childhood sector and the rise of its childcare market.

ECEC in Australia

In Australia, ECEC comprises all formal education and care services offered to children in the years before school, including family day care (based in carers' homes and administered and supported though central coordination units); preschools (available to children in the one or two years before school and often offered on a short day basis) and centre-based childcare (which is available to children from birth to school age). The management and delivery of ECEC includes management by non-profit entities such as community-based associations, local government or government departments (the latter is more common in relation to preschools); independent schools; for-profit companies and publicly listed corporations.

This chapter focuses on childcare centres as this is the sector in which the market is most firmly established. Significantly for this discussion, not all Australian children have access to government-run preschools in the years before school (which are usually free or low cost). Thus many families rely on childcare for their children's access to an early childhood education programme. Preschools and childcare centres are subject to the same regulatory requirements, including the mandated implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the employment of qualified educators. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) monitors and assesses all ECEC against established standards and awards a rating to each centre based on this assessment. There are five rating categories ranging from "excellent" to "significant improvement required" and ACECQA ratings are publicly available online.

An estimated 22% of children under the age of two, 71% of children aged between two and three years of age and 83% of four- and five-year-olds attend ECEC (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015).

Fee Support

To improve the affordability of childcare, the Federal Government provides two types of fee subsidy: Child Care Benefit (CCB) and the Child

Care Rebate (CCR). CCB is a progressive means-tested subsidy paid to parents, based on family income, with higher levels of subsidy available to families with lower incomes. CCR is a tax rebate of up to $7000 that subsidises the gap between the fees that centres actually charge and the government-nominated hourly amount against which the CCB is paid. The CCR is regressive, favouring those families on higher incomes who can cover the cost of the gap until the rebate becomes available. There is no cap on fees and annual increases in the cost of childcare have exceeded the consumer price index for a number of years. Regardless of fee subsidies, childcare is expensive (The Conversation, March 2016).

From Philanthropy to the Market

Understanding the interplay of Australian childcare with internationalisation and elite education necessitates an understanding of the ways in which the provision of ECEC has changed since the turn of the twentieth century from a predominantly not-for-profit, community-based sector to one dominated by private for-profit operators.

The origins of contemporary ECEC in Australia are found in the philanthropic kindergarten and nursery school movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Influenced by the kindergarten movements in Europe and the United States of America (USA), the first Australian kindergarten association was formed in New South Wales (NSW) in 1895. Kindergarten advocates included suffragettes, philanthropists, educational and social reformers, determined to establish free kindergartens in poor suburbs and to transform the way children were educated in the early years of school. But the short days of the kindergarten and restrictions on the age of children who could attend failed to support women who were often forced into paid work through widowhood or desertion by their husbands. Thus the nursery school movement emerged some years later in an effort to provide care for the babies and young children of mothers who had to work. Today, these early philanthropic organisations remain significant providers of non-profit childcare throughout Australia.

Despite the efforts of these advocacy groups for early childhood education to become widespread, the commitment of various governments to early childhood education was haphazard. Major Federal Government investment in ECEC nationally did not occur until the 1970s with the introduction of the *Child Care Act 1972*. This Act was introduced with

bipartisan support for only funding non-profit childcare that was embedded in local communities, with strong parent input (Logan et al. 2013). However, the rise of a neo-liberal economic agenda throughout the 1980s eventually triggered a significant policy shift in 1991 when the Hawke Labor Government announced that families utilising private centres could access government fee subsidies (Press 1999). This resulted in a rapid escalation in the establishment of for-profit centres. The community-based sector soon became overshadowed by for-profit providers, and for-profit providers soon came to be dominated by one publicly listed company, ABC Learning. Between 2001 and 2008, ABC Learning came to be the largest single childcare provider in Australia. At its height it also acquired a number of overseas interests and claimed to be the largest childcare provider in the world (Newberry and Brennan 2013).

However, at the end of 2008, the company collapsed. In order to stave off the inevitable chaos created by such a large part of the childcare market suddenly closing, the Federal Government allocated $100 million to keep centres open while new arrangements were made (Newberry and Brennan 2013). Although the company's dramatic financial collapse sent a strong signal about the shortcomings of commodifying what was previously conceived of as a public good (Newberry and Brennan 2013; Press and Woodrow 2009), government reliance on the market for childcare in Australia remains unshaken. The provision of childcare is still largely a commercial operation and all childcare providers (non-profit and for-profit) find themselves competing for market share.

Has Childcare Marketisation Created an Elite and Internationalised ECEC Sector?

Neo-liberalism has been remarkably successful in its quest to "make markets wider and create new markets where they did not exist before" including in education "whose commodification was once almost unimaginable" (Connell 2013a: 100). While the contemporary childcare market in Australia is largely taken for granted, its "unimaginability" was evident in widespread opposition to this policy change when it was initially mooted in 1990. This opposition was in large part driven by concerns that operating childcare for profit would result in lowering standards (Press 1999). Conversely, proponents of marketisation argued that competition in the marketplace was an incentive for services to improve the quality of ECEC.

A number of studies indicate that the quality of childcare provided through markets is notoriously uneven (Brennan et al. 2012; Cleveland and Krashinsky 2009). This is largely because ECEC is expensive to provide (mainly due to high staffing costs) and competition may occur around affordability rather than quality. For example, when childcare was first opened up to the market in the 1990s, the influx of private providers was so great that in areas of oversupply, commercial operators offered incentives, such as vouchers to toyshops, to entice parents to enrol their children (Loane 1997). As the childcare market has matured, its marketing has become increasingly sophisticated. At its height, ABC Learning engaged in a multimillion-dollar advertising programme, selling its childcare places to parents through cinema and television commercials cut to the tune of the Beatles hit "All You Need Is Love" (Press and Woodrow 2009).

Latterly, for-profit childcare centres are more likely to pitch to parents' aspirations for their children. The websites of commercial childcare companies are replete with assertions about the educational offerings within their centres. Statements such as "the highest standard early education programmes," "the benchmark for quality in early childhood care and education," "leaders in the early childhood education field" are typical. The importance of children's early development for their later success in life is also emphasised, for example:

- *we are the provider-of-choice for parents seeking the very best educational start for their children* (Company 1)
- *endless possibilities for every child* (Company 2)
- *take advantage of the windows of opportunity in these years to give your child the best start toward a lifetime of learning* (Company 1)

One company declares it will

> *build a reputation … as a platinum cutting edge child care operator with advanced educational programming in early childhood* (Company 1)

Centres may also seek to distinguish themselves through the provision of specialist add-ons. For example, a "*menu designed by [a] leading Paediatric Dietitian and Nutritionist and prepared daily by a qualified Chef*" (Company 1). Performing arts studios, specialised sports programmes designed by sports science physiologists, and state-of-the-art

campuses are among the other types of claims made (Company 1, Company 2, Company 3).

Are these claims associated with the development of an elite and internationalised ECEC sector in Australia? To explore this further, we discuss the possibilities for eliteness and internationalisation in early childhood education. However, we address these separately, as it appears for the most part, they follow distinct trajectories.

"Eliteness" in Early Childhood Education: How Is It Manifest?

How might elite education be understood in relation to early childhood education in the Australian context? As highlighted by Prosser (2016), the term "elite education" is fraught with ambiguity. For example, the term "elite" may either refer to the quality of education or the social position of those receiving the education. Kenway and Koh (2015) offer one description of elite schools as being schools of very high rank. Maxwell and Aggleton (2013) point to factors such as independence from the state system, scholastic differentiation, the longevity and history of the school, a record of academic excellence, and the reproduction of eliteness—that is, elite schools shape the next generation of elites. Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009) includes typology and geographical location in his list of elite "markers."

The relatively recent history of formal childcare institutions, and contemporary policy arrangements, preclude many of these markers of eliteness from applying to childcare in Australia. Only a relatively small number of providers have a long established history of providing ECEC, and the legacies of these institutions are grounded in a commitment to redress disadvantage, rather than the education of elites (Press and Wong 2013). Additionally, all childcare is fee paying. While fees vary and may exclude many families from affording particular centres, all centres are bound by the same government guidelines concerning which parents should gain priority. Government-issued priority of access guidelines state that where there are more families requiring care than places available, priority must be given to children at risk of abuse or neglect (priority one); or children whose parents are working, training or studying (priority two); and within these categories, children with disabilities, children with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, children from non-English-speaking

backgrounds, and children of single parents are also prioritised (Department of Education and Training 2016). In addition, all centres are obliged to implement the same curriculum framework. Therefore, it is not possible to identify elite education in ECEC using the same suite of criteria as might be applied in the school sector.

However, there are two expressions of eliteness in early childhood education that can be more readily explored: elite as pertaining to the quality of early childhood education (highly ranked); and early childhood education pertaining to the reproduction of elites.

Elite as an Expression of the Quality of Education

The quality ratings assigned through ACECQA provide an opportunity to examine whether claims of educational excellence are matched in reality. Through the ACECQA process, services are rated against seven quality areas comprising the National Quality Standard (NQS)—educational programme and practice, children's health and safety, physical environment, staffing arrangements, relationships with children, collaborative partnerships with families and communities, and service leadership and management. Centres are then awarded an overall rating of: excellent, exceeding the National Quality Standard; meeting the National Quality Standard; working towards National Quality Standard; or significant improvement required.

To explore this question, we reviewed a sample of centres' quality ratings through the National Quality Standard for Australian ECEC. We produced a snapshot of ratings drawn from two listed for-profit childcare companies, one sole owner for-profit company and two non-profit companies. Where companies owned multiple brands of childcare, we looked at only one brand. In the larger non-profit company we selected the first 25 rated centres for comparison. We only included ratings for childcare centres and preschools. For the purposes of this discussion, we refer to the overall rating only. It must be noted that our snapshot is not a comprehensive review of all companies, or of all brands held by the companies reviewed (Table 9.1).

Such figures indicate that the rhetoric adopted by providers in selling their education and care credentials is not always matched by what is delivered. In other words, the appeal that centres make to "being the best" is not what might be experienced by children and their families and demonstrated through the ACECQA process. Services rated as "exceeding the

Table 9.1 Snapshot of quality rating against provider type

Provider type	*ACECQA overall rating*		
	No. of centres rated as "Working towards the National Quality Standard"	*No. of centres rated as "Meeting the National Quality Standard"*	*No. of centres rated "Exceeding National Quality Standard"*
For-profit listed company (150 total) Company brand (10 total)	6	3	0
For-profit listed company (>450 total) Brand centre (30 total)	9	8	2
For-profit unlisted company (Estimated 25 centres)	2	7	11
Non-profit (Estimated 25 centres)	2	3	13
Non-profit (86 centres total, 25 centres reviewed)	2	6	17

Data obtained from Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) (2016a)
Note: The estimated number of centres does not match the number of rated centres, as all had not been assessed

quality standard" were more likely, but not only, to be found in the non-profit sector. Interestingly, the for-profit provider with a higher percentage of exceeding ratings was not a listed company, but a sole owner who is recorded as saying "running a sustainable childcare business means making decisions that appear 'uneconomic.'" (AFR 2015) The two not-for-profit providers reviewed describe their missions by making an appeal to the educational entitlements of all children, for example, "every family should be able to access affordable, high quality early childhood education and care for their children"; that "the promise and potential of every child is realised" and that "families and communities are strong and caring." This contrasted with the for-profit providers who tended to make individualised appeals to parents, referring to "your child," reflecting the neoliberal discourse of narrow, individualised self-interests.

These indicative findings are consistent with the findings of the ACECQA report on *Quality Area 1 of the National Quality Standard*

(2016b). This pertains to educational programme and practice," and was found to be the outcome that services are least likely to meet.

According to this report, non-profit services were more likely than for-profit services to be rated as "exceeding the quality standard" for their educational programme: with local government-run services (46%), community-managed non-profits (35%) and "other" non-profits (25%) most likely to achieve this rating. Only 16% of private for-profit services were rated as "exceeding the national quality standard in this area" (ACECQA 2016b: 19). Thus claims akin to eliteness, such as offering "the best educational programmes," in "state-of-the-art facilities," staffed by "educators who are leaders in their field," are not always matched by reality.

To further consider elite education as an expression of the quality of education on offer, we searched for the childcare centres and preschools that received the highest rating under the National Quality Standard—that of "excellent." Of these centres, the majority (n = 19) are not-for-profits either attached to local councils, charities, parent committees, universities, or not-for-profit childcare umbrella organisations; six (6) are run by departments of education; three (3) are Montessori schools; four (4) are attached to private schools; and five (5) are for-profit centres. This is an interesting phenomenon with the not-for-profit sector performing disproportionately well and often in areas of socio-economic disadvantage (ACECQA website, May 2015).

The Education of Elites

Turning to Prosser's definition of elite education as also encompassing the education of elites, and Gaztambide-Fernadez's dimension of geographical location, we then examined the ACECQA ratings of centres in three of Australia's most advantaged local government areas: Peppermint Grove, Nedlands and Mosman (ABS) (Table 9.2).

Table 9.2 ACECQA ratings by location

Most advantaged local government areas	*ACECQA overall rating*		
	Working towards	*Meeting*	*Exceeding*
Peppermint Grove (WA)	4	2	
Mosman (NSW)	9	8	2
Nedlands (WA)	2	2	9

Data obtained from Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) (2016a)

In two of these local government areas, the majority of services were not rated at a high standard. Only in Nedlands were the majority of services rated as "exceeding." Thus an area's socio-economic advantage does not necessarily correlate geographic access to elite education.

In order to further interrogate Prosser's contention that "calling a school elite is class formation in action" (ACECQA 2016b: 218), we looked at the ratings of early childhood programmes attached to grammar schools. The vast majority of these early childhood programmes were rated as "exceeding the standard," and three programmes run by grammar schools were rated as "excellent." Again, the ACECQA Report on Quality Area 1 reflects this finding, with 48% of assessed early childhood programmes in independent schools rated as exceeding in this quality area (ACECQA 2016b: 19).

Whilst early childhood programmes attached to already designated elite schools might confirm Prosser's proposition about class formation, the hypothesis that better-quality early childhood programmes are geographically concentrated in more advantaged communities does not seem to hold. Notwithstanding, the one for-profit provider identified in our earlier analysis as having a high percentage of exceeding ratings, reportedly charges fees of at least $164 per day (Marriner and Butt 2013). This restricts the access to such centres to families able to afford a substantial gap between the fee charged and any government subsidy. This suggests a small but emerging elite for-profit childcare sector.

A number of scholars of elite education in schools have identified connections between elite education and internationalisation process within schooling (and higher education). In the following section, we explore expressions of internationalisation in early childhood education and ask whether the same association between elite education and internationalisation holds true in the early years sector.

Internationalisation in ECEC

Is internationalisation, as it is understood in other areas of education, applicable to early childhood education? De Wit (2011) canvasses two overarching categories of internationalisation in education—the cross-border delivery of education and "internationalisation at home." Internationalisation across borders encompasses for instance, the direct delivery of educational programmes in other nations, attracting overseas students, and student mobility programmes. Internationalisation at home

tends to be curriculum oriented, encompassing the development of intercultural awareness and skills.

While a number of scholars of elite education in schools have identified connections between elite education and internationalised schooling, we contend that in Australia at least, these connections are not evident in the same way. This is partly because, as Mierendorff et al. (in this volume) note, the very young ages of the children attending ECEC precludes the widespread adoption of internationalisation strategies involving student mobility. However, more significantly, the ECEC sector in Australia has a long history of adopting strategies that might be now classified as "internationalisation at home." Its focus on intercultural awareness precedes the emergence of a potential elite ECEC sector, and we argue, is deeply embedded in a commitment to equity.

Nonetheless, the dominance of the childcare market does warrant consideration of Pike's (2012) description of neo-liberalism's paradoxical impact on internationalisation in education:

> a movement born out of the communitarian ideals of internationalism and enrichment through cultural exchange, and still able to deliver on those ideals at the micro level, seems inextricably caught up at the macro level in the web of commercialisation (…) (Pike 2012: 142)

Thus we examine the question of internationalisation in ECEC by first discussing expressions of internationalisation at home. We follow by considering whether the market is implicated in internationalisation abroad.

Internationalisation, Multiculturalism and Australian ECEC

To aid comparative discussion, like Mierendorff et al. (in this volume), we adopt as a starting point, Knight's articulation of internationalisation as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery … education" (Knight 2008: xi).

Cogent to this discussion is Australia's cultural diversity. Despite the existence of the racist "White Australia Policy" formally introduced in 1901, the cultural diversity of Australia's population expanded greatly after World War II. Between 1947 and 1953, 170,000 displaced persons from Europe were resettled in Australia commencing a commitment to migration that has continued to the present day.[1] An estimated 28% of

Australians are born overseas, with an additional 20% having at least one parent born overseas (Press 2015). Former Australian Human Rights Commissioner Sev Ozdowski argues that Australian multiculturalism is not a simply demographic descriptor but can be "understood as a social compact that involves power and wealth sharing between different ethno-cultural groups … usually based on equality of status and opportunity" (Ozdowski 2012: no pagination).

Multiculturalism emerged as a public policy ideal in the early 1970s and became official government policy in 1978. In 1979, the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA) was established to raise awareness of cultural diversity and promote social cohesion (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2011). Since that time, the policy of multiculturalism has attracted bipartisan support, although its cultivation and enactment has varied according to the government in power. For example, the conservative Howard Coalition Government (1996–2007) emphasised the assimilation of a range of cultures to a "core set of values" (Lawrence et al. 2012). The Gillard Labor Government (2010–2013), on the other hand, espoused a multiculturalism in which diversity was embraced asserting that "[m]ulticulturalism is the word that we use to capture our love of the things that bind us together and our respect for the diversity that enriches us" (Gillard, cited in Ozdowski 2012).

Against this background, we argue that at both the policy level and the micro level of the setting, Australian ECEC has a tradition of being concerned with the development of culturally responsive curricula and the promotion of intercultural exchange that reflects an enrichment agenda rather than assimilation. Even preceding the emergence of multicultural ideals in the seventies, early childhood education advocates were considering how to respond to the needs of newly arrived migrant families for whom English was not the first language. During the 1950s the Australian Pre-school Association successfully lobbied the government for funding to provide English classes for mothers in migrant hostels while their children were minded by qualified pre-school teachers (Press and Wong 2015). In the subsequent decades, non-profit pre-school providers such as the Kindergarten Union of NSW used vans to take pre-school programmes and playgroups out to newly developed suburbs and grappled with how to cross the barriers of language and culture that stood between the middle-class, English-speaking pre-school teachers and the newly arriving migrant families (Press and Wong 2015). This concern was, at least in part, a

product of the ethic within early childhood education and care of developing close and responsive relationships with families.

Funding for public childcare expansion in the 1970s paralleled other progressive social and political developments, such as the development of multiculturalism as official government policy. As a result, a number of agencies emerged to directly support the development of culturally respectful and responsive early childhood programmes, often supported by government funding. Strategies such as the availability of bilingual support workers, the implementation of anti-bias curriculum (Creaser and Dau 1995; Derman-Sparks 1989) producing and making available resources reflecting family and cultural diversity have been evident in ECEC programmes since the late 1970s. In 1981, for instance, the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Sydney—a demonstration early childhood programme—was funded by government to establish a Multicultural Resource Centre "to assist children's services to promote the skills and attitudes within their programmes suited to the rich diversity of New South Wales multicultural society" (cited in Press and Wong 2016: 38). Today, respect for cultural diversity is a principle embedded in the Early Years Learning Framework (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR] 2009).

Internationalisation in Curriculum

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) applies to all ECEC settings. In their examination of the EYLF, Millei and Jones (2014) provide two readings of how its intentions and enactments might be understood. On the one hand, they postulate that the EYLF and its associated policy documents construct a "global space" for early childhood education that is infused with neo-liberalism. They argue that such documents construct early childhood education as the space in which to promote "specific skills, to produce 'globally minded and entrepreneurial subjects' rather than educated and ethical communities" (Millei and Jones 2014: 73). This reading of the EYLF in part arises from its origins in the Labor Government's (2007–2013) "Education Revolution" which expounded upon the "critical link between long term prosperity, productivity growth and human capital investment" (Australian Labor Party 2007: 1) and the positioning of policy for ECEC under the national *Productivity Agenda* (Millei and Jones 2014). At the same time, Millei and Jones (2014) offer a counter reading of the EYLF as containing a social imaginary in which

children can come to understand themselves in relation to "humanity as a whole" (Millei and Jones 2014: 77) through, for example, its emphasis on the cultivation of respect for difference and the practice of "inclusive ways of achieving coexistence" (DEEWR 2009: 27).

Millei and Jones' (2014) latter reading resonates with Pike's conceptualisation of internationalisation within a globalised community as one that can recognise that the "care and concern for neighbours, one of the defining characteristics of a well-functioning community, becomes a global, rather than just a local ethic" (Millei and Jones 2014: 134). This approach is consistent with the aim of Article 29 of the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child* (1989). This Article states that "the education of the child shall be directed to:

> the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin (…)

Like Millei and Jones (2014) and Pike (2012), we can see two sometimes contradictory trends in the internationalisation of ECEC. The first concerned with equity and social cohesion through the promotion of intercultural understanding and the adoption of culturally responsive educational practices; and the second, more concerned with creating a culturally agile subject, able to negotiate a global economy.

Internationalisation in Commercialisation

Is Pike's (2012) assertion that at the macro-level, the internationalisation of education is caught in a "web of commercialisation" true of Australian ECEC? Before its collapse, ABC Learning held interests in Canada, New Zealand, the USA, the UK and, through its acquisition of one of the US-based providers, South East Asia (Newberry and Brennan 2013; Press and Woodrow 2009). Its internal "web of commercialisation" included the vertical integration of related businesses (e.g., educational toy supplies, furniture and professional training). While ABC Learning's foray into international markets might not be replicated to the same extent by current commercial players, at least one Australian childcare company currently runs a centre in Singapore. As national providers cross borders to enter global markets, internationalisation becomes both a response to and agent of globalisation (Pike 2012).

However, while there are indicators that there are opportunities for an internationalised market in the delivery of ECEC across borders, this delivery is not tied to that of elite education.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have sought to examine elite and internationalised ECEC in Australia, with a particular focus on exploring their interplay and the implications for a childcare market. We asked, does the market give rise to the formation of elite education for very young children, and if so, whom does this education serve? We then examined expressions of internationalisation in ECEC and considered the ways in which internationalisation may or may not be implicated in the production of elite ECEC.

Prosser (2016) writes that the "sale and purchase of educational opportunities" has transformed "an experience generally regarded as an important social good, to become a consumable means of social distinction, rather than a social leveler" (Prosser 2016: 220). This concern about the inequality that can arise from education as consumption is echoed by Connell (2013b) who argues that central to the neo-liberal project is the need to restore privilege.

There is no doubt that operators within the childcare market vie for custom by making claims to offer the best in ECEC and appealing to parents' aspiration for their children. These claims and aspirational appeals relate to the facilities provided, attention to nutrition, the promise of a rich curriculum and parents' desire to ensure their childcare choices optimise their children's chances of future success. However, such claims to quality are not always matched with external ratings of quality and thus the act of selling childcare is disassociated with the reality of the educational product.

The disjuncture between what is claimed by the market, and what is on offer, complicates our understanding of elite education in ECEC. In reality, it is the non-profit sector, which does not position itself as elite, that is more likely to deliver the most highly rated early childhood education programmes. Not-for-profit community-based services are disproportionately more likely to offer services ranked as excellent. But the picture is not clear-cut. Alongside the high-performing elements of the non-profit sector are expensive, well-resourced, high-performing early childhood educational settings attached to elite schools. A smaller but emerging trend is a high-end for-profit childcare sector. Yet, the outperformance of the non-

profit sector on quality as measured through the National Quality Framework suggests a failure of the prevailing market logic about competition and its effects. This finding disrupts both the perceptions families might have gained through marketing, and a "market logic" that privileges competition as the lever for quality assurance. So how might elite early childhood education be understood? There is no doubt that there is a high-performing sector that might be classified elite based on its quality ranking. The question remains whether the emergence of a high-end sector in both independent schools and high-fee-paying private childcare, will become implicated as primarily concerned with the education of elites.

Our exploratory work in investigating how concepts of internationalisation and elite education might be understood in the Australian ECEC market is both intriguing and revealing and at times contradicts emerging themes in this arena of educational research.

In relation to internationalisation, our research suggests that the ECEC sector has on the whole positioned itself strongly in relation to multiculturalism as a public good and the promotion of ideals of global education (Pike 2012). These intercultural ideals have roots in the history of early childhood education, Australian multicultural policy and the progressive social movements of the 1970s and are currently reinforced by the requirements of the Australian early years' curriculum. However, still to be explored is the extent to which deep intercultural understanding is embedded throughout the ECEC system, both public and private. Further, we ask whether globalisation is inscribing internationalisation in ECEC in new ways. There is rich potential for research exploring how implementation of the EYLF in local sites reflects varying constructions of internationalisation and the global (child) citizen. Will centres, for example, promote international exposure and mindedness as a resource for families wanting to concertedly cultivate their child (Vincent and Maxwell 2015)? We have also noted that in the future, the highly commercialised sector of ECEC may re-enter the international markets (as universities and increasingly schools appear to be doing).

The relationship between the market, the development of elite education and internationalisation in Australian early childhood education plays out in complex and unexpected ways that are nuanced and distinctive to the research findings in the schooling and higher education sectors. Our findings suggest that as elite schooling and international education are under-researched in the early childhood context, considerable potential exists for their exploration, both individually and in relation to each other.

The distinctiveness of findings in these early forays foregrounds the need for fine-grained research that explores institutional, organisation- and actor-based contexts in order to better understand how these phenomena are manifest in ECEC and how they might be accounted for conceptually.

Notes

1. Notwithstanding Australia's widely criticised mistreatment of asylum seekers.

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