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**Author(s):** Zsuzsa, Millei; Alasuutari, Maarit

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## **Binds of professionalism: Attachment in Australian and Finnish early years policy**

**Zsuzsa Millei & Maarit Alasuutari**

### *Introduction*

Attachment theory is often referenced in psychology, social work and early childhood care and education, and ubiquitous in popular publications directed to parents, carers and educators of young children. It is considered as a ‘grand theory’ and explains “the growth of social relationships from infants’ experiences with their caregivers and the consequent social preference called attachment” (Mercer, 2011, p. 26). Founded on Bowlby’s pre-eminent construction, the theory’s basic formulation and application have remained relatively continuous and influential worldwide. In this chapter we do not aim to add yet another critique of the theory itself or its rightful or wrongful understanding and application, there are numerous publications that do just that. Rather, we consider attachment theory and its various manifestations in different documents as ‘attachment discourses’. We glean critical psychologists who rethought psychology as part of ‘psy-complex’, “the sprawling speculative and regulative network of theories and practices that constitute psychology (Ingleby, 1985; Rose, 1985)” (Parker, 2002, p. 199), including attachment, as ‘discourse practice’ (Burman et al, 1996; [Parker, 2007](#)). In addition to shed light on the operation of psychology in various areas of life, they also showed how “psychological effects are more than discursive in that they enter into the material structure of major institutions [including early childhood education and care] that govern our experience as well as our actions” (Burman, 1996, p. 1). Following their analytical strategy, we make a step back from psychology to obtain a critical distance that enables us to destabilize attachment’s claims that normalize views about feelings, behaviors and experiences between various carers and the child, and that pathologize people who do not fit in (Burman et al.,

1996). Statements, forming part of attachment discourses, travel and policy makers variously interpret, recreate and put into action those, such as Bowlby's initial or others' related constructions. They meet and merge with and often they stand in contestation to other discourses in policies (Ball, 2015, p. 311). The focus of our chapter is on the operation of attachment discourses in early childhood policy and practice prescriptions. We discuss how they constitute (what they say about) 'the child', 'the adult' and the relations, feelings, duties and responsibilities of actors and with what effects (what they do).

In our post-structuralist policy and practice analysis, we attempt to trouble also our own positions, including our realist representational practices as academics, and the ways in which psychology is also an implicit ingredient of our own professional and everyday lives and writing (Burman *et al*, 1996; [Petersen, 2015](#)). So to keep in check the text we produce as "disembodied and 'objective' knowers" as realist and psychological frameworks usually present their authors ([Lather & Smithies, 1997](#), p. xvi); and the ways in which we also operate within the 'psy complex' as researchers, we introduce a different voice in our text. We use this different speaking position to trouble or transgress the discourse we produce and to "extend interpretive power beyond the borders of the officially sanctioned researcher" (Pignatelli, 1998, p. 405). This voice catches the realist, the operation of psychology/ists in our text. We posit this 'voice' (in italics) in dialogue with the text.

*Here I am. They introduced me. I was asked to transgress their text and to catch when it is inscribed by psy discourses. This is a difficult task to undertake but I will attempt. Foucault helps me here, as he argues that knowledge is gained only by the critique of knowledge since knowledge is implicated in power. So I will critique the knowledge that is produced in this text. I will look for epistemological strategies to create 'pure knowledge', such as deduction, induction, syllogism or interpretation, that are all attempts to control thought and action. I will 'think' with the text, where 'thinking' is a continual transgression of established norms and truths. To help my work of transgression I use these questions: What are the epistemological strategies the text is using? What norms and dynamics do the text re/produce while it also critiques? How does the text create particular knowledge claims? What positioning/s the text is written from and what positioning/s it creates for the reader?*

*Here is the first one! Among all the possible ways in which a relationship between mother and child can be understood is deduced in the text to the one offered by a governmentality perspective – attachment is understood as a discourse regulating people through the norms it prescribes. So the 'truth' of 'attachment theory' is replaced with another 'truth'. However, this knowledge is not free of power, the power to persuade the reader to read attachment as the authors painstakingly laid out.*

### *Positioning, contexts and politics: Two 'sides'*

We are two academics trained in psychology and work as academics in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC). In our research and teaching, we are critical of the ways the 'psy-complex' operates in early childhood policy and practice. After Zsuzsa moved to Finland for two years from Australia, we met with Maarit, a Finnish Professor of ECEC. Our informal discussions about early childhood in these two countries led us to develop a 'hunch' about the influence of and current but differing take on attachment theory in these contexts, and the ways in which they regulate certain actors. As Petersen (2015, p. 150) argues using Ozga's work, "research projects tend to spring from the hunches that researchers develop as they travel along the discursive webs we have come to know as the social world", so we decided to undertake a 'study'. We

considered attachment theory as an idea that travel or flow across boundaries and are being translated or undergo change in its new settings ([Cowen, 2009](#)). We were interested to think further about what is being created as attachment and how it operates in these two policy contexts.

*Reading these words: ‘academics’, ‘trained in psychology’ and ‘working in early childhood’ I wonder what they do by conjuring up a world of highly accomplished intellectuals. Reminding me of what Parker said, Maarit is then associated with a scientific rank that lends her authority ‘to know’ people and their actions, as psychologists do. As Parker (2007, p. 11) explains further: “Traditional psychologists all too often tell us that this is the way the world is, this is the way people are, this is what can and cannot be done, as if they knew. But they do not” (Parker).*

*In the next sentence, as if the curtain would fall, the text changes to an informal tone. As if manufacturing uncertainty and unfamiliarity that poststructuralist researchers should have based on their epistemological stance. In my opinion this kind of informality cautiously takes away the reader from the authoritative introduction of the ‘performers’ and their weight on their arguments. However, that doesn’t mean that the arguments become less authoritative.*

Translation is a useful concept for our analysis. According to Cowen (2009, p. 323), translation is “the shape-shifting of educational institutions or the re-interpretation of educational [and psychological] ideas which routinely occurs with the transfer in space: ‘the chameleon process’”. He continues by arguing that transfer, translation and transformation of ideas and organisations are most intense (time-compressed), and we add discernible, when there is a collapse or redefinition of a political vision. Although we cannot claim such a grand change that, for example, accompanied the end of the Soviet Bloc, we still think that the rapid developments that took place from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the economisation and neoliberalisation of ECEC in most economically developed nations (OECD) marks a watershed that has led to the intensive re/translation of older and new ideas into policies and practice prescriptions worldwide (Moss, 2015). Attracting the support and attention of nation states from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in even those countries that

have neglected early childhood education until then (we could arguably place Australia here), nations started to put money into developing services and policy initiatives in ECEC (Moss, 2015). As Moss (2015, p. 227) continues to explain:

What, in particular, has refocused governmental attention on early childhood education is a belief, fed by the influence of relatively new disciplines and theories, in particular neuroscience and human capital, that early intervention, in the very first years of life, provides an effective and relatively cheap technical fix for both social and economic failings, often expressed in terms of a high rate of return on ‘social investment’ in this field.

With the increased focus and the newly found ‘super power’ attributed to ECEC in economic realms, technologies of control have also been

increasingly applied that take shape for example “as general structures and one dimensional standards for practices. These are based on contemporary and updated developmentally appropriate practices [based on psychological theories and research] ... In fact, the more complex things become the more we seem to desire processes of reduction and thus increase control” (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 14). Set against

*I am reading here about a world that is described in a very particular way: things flow, get translated, a worldwide agreement on ECEC is constructed then suddenly a separate analytical space emerges with two perspectives. Those are justified powerfully: worth to be taken up in the analysis. The difference created here forms a part of the inductive logic of the analysis that prepares a deductive reasoning to arrive at in the conclusion. My question is why among the many other possibilities this difference has been picked, what are its effects and how conclusions could have been made otherwise?*

this backdrop, we were thinking about the ways how attachment has been translated and operationalized in this seemingly uniform global context of ECEC in two countries: Finland with a long history of large governmental investment into ECEC since the 1970s (Karila, 2012) and Australia with a relatively new and large federal investment from 2007<sup>i</sup> (Sumsion, Barnes, Cheeseman, Harrison, Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2010).

Our politics here springs from two sources.

First, Parker's (2002) definition of critical activity in psychology calls for the deconstruction of mental phenomena that is invariably located in

*While we are at this point, I need to say that I am also acting here in a certain way, offering you a particular way to read this text. Am I governing you, reader?*

individuals' heads or 'insides', such as attachment as it is argued to be located in the child and carer (see explanation later). He argues to reposition these phenomena within the operation of discourse between people. Second, and relatedly, our politics springs from Foucault's notion of governmentality according to which psychology works as a technology of government that regulate people through their own freedom by offering / conditioning possibilities between which they can choose ([Rose, 1999](#)). Psychological discourses are vested with power that regulates individuals to become certain subjects and by aligning their actions through their rational choice rather than coercion ([Rose, 1999](#)).

### *Constructing the 'normal' adult child relationship*

Attachment is variously defined as a developing and changing affective relationship between child and carer in response to the experience of the relationship ([Cassidy & Shaver, 2008](#)). Attachment research is a large field that spreads across physiological, clinical, developmental and social psychology journals and include numerous anthologies besides the same size of research that adapts these theories to applied fields, including ECEC. Due to this voluminous research, authors themselves utilize various definitions, often in contestation, of what attachment is and what the theory is aimed to explain and how. Others search for the 'real' definition, such as Vicedo (2011, p. 402), who suggests to taking into account Bowlby's original historico-political context of the 1950s characterized by critical debates about women's role in modern society to arrive at a 'better' understanding of the theory. All in all and after various debates, Karen (1994, p. 90) defines that attachment for Bowlby represents a "complex, developing process" that is "close to the idea of love, if not identical with it".

*Descriptions of attachment theory in this text help to produce it as a reality in a scientific shape. Especially when this text uses lots of references to others' work. They 'researched' this concept and what they thought this concept encompasses and captured those in their studies, such as warmth, kindness, attention, longevity etc. Sounds like everyday life, isn't it? As Parker (2007, p. 3) also explains: "Psychology pretends that it is a science, but it draws its images of the human being from culture and from everyday life to construct its object" (Parker, 2007, p.3). How else can parent and child, teacher and child relations be known, felt, sensed ...? In what other ways it would be possible to talk about these relationships? Maybe as poets do?*

*"I SEE the sleeping babe, nestling the breast of its mother;  
The sleeping mother and babe—hush'd, I study them long and long."  
Mother and Babe by Walt Whitman*



Taken for granted in psychology, Bowlby (1958) took attachment as a mental phenomenon and theorized the *interiority of the child and mother* and their relation to each other. He explained that the child-mother dyad composes a biological system, they are tied to each other, “babies are so designed by Nature that they beguile and enslave mothers” (Bowlby, 1958, p. 351). Creating the notion of mother-child bond, Bowlby drew on, amongst other theorists, Lorenz’s notion of imprinting, an internal biological instinct that infant birds exhibit towards the first moving

*Maybe I could tell about that relationship from the point of view of children (but still described by adults ...) how would children sense a special relationship between an adult and the child?*

*In a preschool “Simon (1,6) is sitting at a high chair and has been playing with a puzzle for a short while. He stops his play, looks around in the playroom, and the presence of an educator catches his attention. He points towards her and calls her name gladly. She calls his name back with a cheerful voice. He climbs down on the floor and walks to her. She lifts him up, saying, ‘Come here, my little one’. Simon smiles.” (Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2015, p. 1487)*

object they see (Vicedo, 2011; Karen, 1994). In his search for a model of attachment he devised the concept of ‘internal working models’ to describe the ways in which interaction patterns between child and trusted person(s) turns into relationship representations of self and other in attachment relations (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). This is an internal model in each person that is being built, used and revised, and that “allows us, for example, to imagine interactions and conversations with others, based on our previous experiences with them” (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008, p. 103). These models are constructed in interpersonal relationships but the most important relationships are becoming the property of the child (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby then “wedded this idea to Piaget’s (1951, 1952) theory of sensorimotor development, representation, and perspective taking” (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008, p. 108) and devised his developmental stages of attachment.

Mary Ainsworth (1967), adding greatly to Bowlby's theory, hypothesized five stages of attachment development and also developed the notion of 'secure attachment'. She argued that infants with secure attachments tend to explore their environment with the comforting knowledge that their caregivers will reassure them if needed (Ainsworth et al., 1978). 'Insecure attachment', according to Ainsworth, potentially leads to lowered self-esteem, relationship issues, inability or difficulty in seeking help and deformed character development that lasted through to a person's adult life. Ainsworth with her work firmly outlined 'normal' attachment and the pathology attached to it.

The gendered and conservative ideology underpinning Bowlby's psychological theory lays down 'normal relationship' in relation to economic life. Accommodating to the shifting economic and social demands in light of the weakening of 'traditional' family system of the 1950s and the changing priorities of the welfare state, variations to the theory redefined what was considered 'normal' (Billington, 1996). The 'mother' in the theory became a 'specific person' – a father, carer or educator. Also, more than one person could experience feelings of attachment with a child, and vice versa. Attachment theory and its shifting formats reflect the changing cultural meanings of motherhood, family and the

*I notice that in the void created by deconstruction, a position is inserted that is better valued. At the same time the text appears in a light of objectivity "claiming to know 'from nowhere'", as the positivist tradition would have it (Petersen, 2015, p. 148). As Foucault tells us, in the will to truth power seeks to protect itself by mystifying its control over knowledge. However, I discern its operation and triumph here, to instil and develop its hold on the reader by showing a careful review of the literature, by shoring up different (but carefully selected) views of experts – points and counterpoints as if to control its 'unreason', summarizing and leading the argument in a premeditated direction, and to go hand in hand with the reader so the reader can follow the reasoning of the text - as intended.*

'quality' of the child. The 'quality' of the child in relation to its upbringing was initially expressed by concerns in relation to the child's environment about the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century expressed with a

focus on hygiene. Later ‘quality’ was considered in the character of the child (from the 1950s) that was followed by the psychological health of the child from the 1980s, as Alldred’s (1996) genealogy of psychological concerns about child-raising describes. Currently ‘quality’ is closely linked to the healthy brain defined in neuroscience knowledge (Millei, 2015). In this way, the different forms of attachment theory link/ed ‘appropriate relationship’ to the ‘quality’ of the child in different ways.

Attachment theory is an influential frame for understanding relationships in contemporary early childhood policy and practice (in Australia see [Degotardi and Pearson, 2009](#); in Finland see Horppu & Ikonen-Varila, 2004). There have been numerous publications that promoted attachment-related concepts to early childhood practitioners (e.g. [Raikes, 1996](#); [Honig, 2002](#); Elfer et al, 2003; [Harrison, 2003](#); Rolfe, 2004; Wittmer & Petersen, 2005; Dolby, 2007) and incorporated attachment constructs into early childhood policy, curriculum and pedagogical documents ([Degotardi and Pearson, 2009](#)). In these texts,

*The observer and knower position of the authors – psychologists aren’t they – is quite blatant by the end of this review, do you notice that too? I see a scenario developing: ‘Attachment’ is sitting on the (psychologist’s) couch. The psychologist examines it to understand its workings doing by doing. Then she establishes a truth about its ‘true’, ‘hidden’, ‘deeply held’ or ‘unconscious’ nature that remained inaccessible before – even for attachment (the patient) - but non the less regulating. This is the foundation that is prepared for the psychologist to give advice.*

*I question how a post-foundational Foucauldian analysis can arrive to a foundation this way.*

in a general manner, the above-explored variations of attachment discourses and subjects are reiterated in the contexts of various other ECEC discourses. For example, it is argued that infants’ attachment has implications for their *learning*, that is, to independently explore and learn about their world and to form *new relationships*. It is also maintained that attachment also affects children’s *self-confidence* with which they explore their environment ([Raikes, 1996](#)). Based on these understanding, early childhood settings are often thought of as environments where children maintain existing

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attachments, form new attachments to significant figures, or as sites where relationships with significant others could replace ‘insecure attachments’, and finally as sites of intervention in children and parents’ lives who suffer from ‘attachment issues’ ([Horppu & Ikonen-Varila, 2004](#); Aylward, Murphy, Colmer & O’Neill, 2010; [Buyse, Vesrchueren & Doumen, 2009](#)). However, not all observers are in agreement that attachment theory is ubiquitous in early childhood education and care. Some contest this view, such as Cortazar & Herredos (2010) from the US context. They argue “that attachment theory has not been widely used as an explanatory theory in this field” while it could be utilized to “better understand why some children do not adapt to our preschool settings” (Cortazar & Herredos, 2010, p. 193).

### ***Our task***

We untangle, as Foucault (1971) proposed, how the ‘psy-complex’ operates in early childhood policy and practice through the dynamic and contingent interplay between ‘attachment discourses’, policy frames and pedagogies in various texts and contexts. Our attention is focused on how subjectivities, power relations and practice subscriptions are produced by attachment discourses. To do this work we use Ian Parker’s (2002) model of the ‘psy-complex’, Foucault inspired discourse analysis and the concept of governmentality in our analysis. We consider policies as discourse where the take-up of attachment theory produces discursive statements and emotions that tell a story about the self and ways to perform this self: ‘the child’, ‘the teacher’ and ‘the parent/adult’. Our aim is to open spaces in which *it becomes necessary* to think about what ‘we’ do or what we produce in Australia and Finland with the take up of attachments theory in relation to particular childhoods, children, families, early childhood education and care, and professional work (Ball, 2015, p. 311 paraphrased).

To help our analysis of attachment discourses we ask the following questions: What statements, stories and emotions do attachment discourses produce in early childhood policy and practice? What

conditions of possibility attachment statements offer for the individual to understand, monitor, regulate and improve her or himself and with what effects?

*Policy contexts: Australia and Finland*

In policy texts, the early years in Australia is positioned as a key aspect in ensuring mothers' workforce participation and as helping to raise a productive future workforce. Both agendas are related to the maintenance of economic competitiveness nationally and internationally through guaranteeing "the social and economic functioning of society into the future" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007, 4). The importance of the early years is mostly argued in financial terms, as actual investments and

*The context for each country is constructed in front of my eyes – a 'realist history' (Petersen, 2015) is composed from a highly selective treatment of history, policy frameworks and provision descriptions. This construction then can be and are set against one another from particular (objective) frames of viewing to reach the intended effect – so to see the similarities and differences the text wants you to see: "As Foucault (1980) notes scientificity is something that is assembled, it is a performativity; processes are presented in certain ways, arguments for the choice of these processes are made in a particular way and so on. The passive language, for example, makes it appear as if no human subject was involved in any extensive way." (Petersen, 2015, p. 155).*

returns in specific dollar amounts, by drawing on longitudinal studies of investments into ECEC. Returns are put into terms of savings on welfare spending (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007, 10), such as crime, unemployment, social and health services and so on. However, the system (if it could be termed that way) is far from fulfilling these aspirations. As the current McKell Institute's Report (Brennan & Adamson, 2015, p. 7) summarizes, "parents of one in six children were struggling to access child care services in their area, with just over one half of parents indicating that a failure to secure child care was hindering their ability to meet work commitments". The report adds that Australia spends less than the OECD average on ECEC where the provisioning is dominantly user

paid and include community, private and for-profit centers with a very small number of centres provided by state or municipal governments<sup>ii</sup>.

From the end of the last century two dominant and intertwined discursive threads are present in Australian policies: risk and neurosciences. Knowledges and mechanisms for risk management include regimes of quality assurance, monitoring, regulation, centralized planning and evaluation. These assessment regimes re/produce discourses of ‘risk’ and ‘assurance’, legitimizing their own introduction. At the same time, they also reframe pedagogies to mitigate these risks. They have fuelled considerable changes in ECEC that resulted in the release of a *National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care* (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). This agenda subsequently included the publication of national regulatory policies, establishment of a national ECEC organization (ACECQA) and the publication of the first national ECEC curriculum (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [AGDEEWR], 2009) applicable to all early years settings, which here we will term as ‘day care’ disregarding their specificities and differences in provision.

In Finland since the 1970s the government invested first to build the day care system making it available to all parents who were in employment by the mid 80s. Then, the focus shifted on pedagogical aspects, less addressed previously ([Kampmann, 2004](#)). Since the 1990s, each child has had a statutory right for ECEC after the maternal and parental leaves, which end when the child is around 10 months old. From the new century, early childhood became an investment not only in families’ lives but also in children’s lives. ECEC is considered as education and as the first phase of lifelong learning (e.g. Karila 2012). However, it is also associated with the municipal day care, since public day-care centres and family day care (in group of four children) are the main institutions providing both early childhood education and childcare in the country. The obligatory preschool classes for six-year-olds are also often organised in day-care centres. In Finnish political debates, the

Teacher Union and politicians commonly refer to ECEC as an investment in to the (society's) future. Although the mothers' low attendance in labour market is nowadays highly debated in Finland, the debates do not relate to ECEC that much because of the child's right to ECEC. They focus mainly on the function of home-care allowance that the parents are entitled to if their child, younger than three years, is not in public day care. Due to the homecare allowance, small children are nowadays more often cared for at home or in other informal contexts in Finland than in most European countries (e.g. Repo, 2009).

The Finnish legislation on early childhood education and care emphasises the child's overall development and wellbeing as well as learning, education, and the quality of the early education environment. One of the statutory goals of ECEC is also to secure stable relationships between the child and the early education staff (Varhaiskasvatuslaki 1973/36<sup>iii</sup>) In 2003, the first national curriculum guidelines on ECEC were published in Finland (Stakes 2004), which is now under revision. They are not a binding document, but a 'core plan', which presents the principles and content orientations of ECEC. The curriculum guidelines have a social-pedagogical orientation and emphasise play.

#### *Selection of data for analysis*

For the analysis we have reviewed those early years policy documents in both countries that govern the provision of ECEC and were released after the turn of the century. Other policies were selected in a process that was more of sampling than accounting for all other existing

*A poststructural analysis, and see, "the realist context-making" is followed by the norm of "scientific method section" (Petersen, 2015, 155) as in a positivist study.*



documents. The analysed documents include national curriculum documents, policy initiatives, reports and guidebooks or training materials that translate the curriculum to more practical prescriptions.

### *Psy-complex*

‘Psy-complex’ “pertains to the individual, self-monitoring subject and the many practices that subjects employ to survey and improve themselves (Foucault, 1966, 1976a)” (Parker, 2002, p. 199). Psychological theories and practices provide subjects sets of narratives to understand themselves, act in specific ways, and a set of norms according to which the subject can surveil and develop themselves (Foucault, 1980). These narratives are composed of discursive statements that constitute the ways in which we think and feel about problems and solutions. Parker (2002) discusses 6 discursive complexes of ‘psy’ (already prevalent in Freud’s work) that are structured into three pairs. We understand these complexes as dynamics that produce ‘psy’ related discursive statements and their power effects. The first pair is ‘ego’ versus ‘id’, where ‘ego’ works as a defence against that is outside of ‘normal’, and that is being produced by the ‘id’. The ‘not normal’ is the constitutive outside of the ‘normal’ (rational), thus by producing the ‘not normal’ the ‘id’ constitutes the ‘normal’ as well<sup>iv</sup>. For example, by constituting what is ‘insecure attachment’, how to ‘normally’ relate also takes form. The second pair is ‘working through’ and ‘acting out’ that constitutes places where ‘rational’ debate may take place but also spaces where the defence mechanism of the ‘ego’ can be activated in the form of ‘acting out’. For example, the preschool could work as both. As a place of ‘acting out’, the child can display signs of ‘insecure attachment’ and educators aim to accommodate this behaviour. As a ‘therapeutic place’, the educator can ‘treat’ the faulty or missing relationship by offering advice to parents or by forming an attachment with the child to fill the need. The third pair, ‘stages of development’ vs ‘polymorphous perversity’, is the most familiar in ECEC since the notion



of the ‘developing child’ carries this dynamism. ‘Stages of development’ or ‘developmental progress’ is an often critiqued discursive complex of ‘psy’ (see Walkerdine, 1993, Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997). This complex shapes how psychological theories understand the human lifespan, in sequences that surpass previous ones in a measure of advancement. As we do our analysis, we read policies against these pairs and spot ‘psy’ in its dynamics of operation in statements and their power effects.

### *‘Psy’ dynamics in policies*

Many documents both in Finland and Australia translate attachment as an ‘emotional tie’ or ‘bond’ between a child and a parent, often qualifying it as a ‘strong’ or ‘secure’ emotional tie that is the basis of children’s well-being (e.g. Finnish curriculum - Stakes, 2004, p. 15; 2005, p. 13; Australian curriculum - AGDEEWR, 2009). For example, in the Finnish curriculum, attachment promotes wellbeing and learning. At the same time as creating relations with these two important aims of ECEC, it normalises the kind of relationship that is necessary for those: stable, warm and personal relationships for learning and wellbeing:

Children’s well-being in ECEC activities is promoted through stable<sup>v</sup> and warm personal relationships. Their relationships to parents, educators and other children are fostered... (Stakes, 2004, p. 15; 2005, p. 13).

Warm personal<sup>vi</sup> relationships provide a basis for [in the original, ‘good’] learning (Stakes, 2004, p. 17; 2005, p. 16).

In the Australian curriculum wellbeing, learning and attachment are also linked, where wellbeing is a prerequisite to learning and promoted by relationships that are – warm and trusting:

Children’s wellbeing can be affected by all their experiences within and outside of their early childhood settings. To support children’s learning, it is essential that educators attend to children’s wellbeing by providing warm, trusting relationships, predictable and safe environments, affirmation and respect ... (AGDEEWR, 2009, p. 30)

Attachment discourses frame normal relationships and construct non-normal relationships that are cold, lacking trust and stability, and are ‘risky’ to children’s wellbeing and learning. Relationships

are rendered on a developmental trajectory where ‘secure’ attachment is positioned at the end of progression, needing ‘one-on-one’ attention, play, routines, reading sessions to develop there (Educators’ Guide to EYLF). Attachment, thus, is progressively built, as it is explained in the ‘*Educators’ stories and models for practice*’ section of the Educators’ Guide to the EYLF (p. 117):

One on one and shared enjoyable experiences will help our developing primary care attachment and give Layla the confidence and trust to be able to explore her environment with less inhibition, therefore learning more and more.

The idea of progressive development introduces temporality and gradation to the relationship that is extended in time and has consequences for the child’s later wellbeing. The Finnish documents outline that the relationship with the main attachment figure can continue to have its influence on the child’s adaptive competence in situations in which the attachment figure is not present, and can have effect on her or his learning and overall development (e.g. Stakes 2004, p. 17; 2005, p. 16). In the above quote and also in other Australian documents, this influence is not discussed explicitly rather it is implied: without the attachment developed in the family, the child is inhibited in her exploration but building secure attachment with the educator will remedy this problem.

Research has shown that babies are both vulnerable and competent. Babies’ first attachments within their families and within other trusting relationships provide them with a secure base for exploration and learning (AGDEEWR, 2009, p. 12).

The notion ‘secure’ is used in a double meaning in both contexts. First, in the form of quality of attachment that is hard to break. ‘Secure’ attachment

*I understand, the discourse analysis attempts to reconstruct how acts, feelings and notions are made sense of as attachment in policy documents that give rise to particular practices of attachment that are vested with power. However, I could, the same way, read this analysis also as interpretations where authors search for ‘deeper meanings’ and ‘intentions’ hidden in these documents and now uncovered with the careful ‘analytical’ work of the writers (psychologists looking for repressed feelings, acts, memories etc.). So the truths that have been so far ‘repressed’, inaccessible and at the same time controlling ‘come out’ in to the open, can be acted out, diagnosed and remediated.*

only develops with time and as a result of the caregiver’s continuous labour (as in the previous

quote). In the second meaning, 'secure' attachment provides a stronghold for the child. It operates as a defence, for example, in the presence of unknown peers or adults, and when entering a new environment. 'Secure attachment' creates a safe micro-space that could 'travel' with the child into new environments, such as different institutions, school or society, and through the life of the child.

As soon as the 'normal' relation is created, the outside is constituted, the 'not normal'. ECEC in Australia is listed as one of the avenues to grapple inequalities, such as wealth differentials and the resulting environmental disadvantages and loss of economic productivity. This social and economic agenda seamlessly mixes with the discourse of attachment in the Policy Brief authored by The Centre for Community Child Health Centre (CCCHC) (2009) (aiming to inform the government's early years policy in Australia):

... children's relationships, particularly with their parents or primary caregivers, are highly vulnerable to the stress that is often associated with poverty (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2006). In turn, this compromises child development and stymies the realisation of human potential. The ability of a child to reach his or her full potential, and become a self-sufficient and successful adult, is particularly limited when a family remains consistently poor.

Poverty stymies human potential – the 'not normal' is constituted – but 'proper' attachment relationship provides the 'normal' future of the child. If poverty continuously persists around the child, it can prevent the development or break 'secure' relationship, and can lead to the state of 'polymorphous perversity' of crime, unemployment and so on. In this equation, even if the assumed consequences are left unsaid, the responsibility fall back to the parent and her or his 'resilience' in poverty to be able to create and maintain warm and trusting relationship with the child. Another Policy Brief (CCCHC, 2006, p. 2) makes this link more explicit: "how well their [parents'] basic needs (income, employment, housing) are met; their social connectedness", employment and related workplace arrangements improve. The parent is constructed as 'poor' implying also 'poor parenting', a powerful construction that marks and regulates those parents' lives who do not meet the minimum living standards. Similarly to feminist scholars' arguments, constructing parents and parenting as

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‘poor’ ‘legitimize normative concepts of motherhood [parenthood] and mandate[s] social services and clinical inventions to police working class caregiving’ (Duschinsky et. al, 2014, p. 6; [Vicedo, 2011](#)). The individualisation of social and educational problems is prevalent in these policies, a process referred to as ‘the parenting turn’ that reduces parents to sites of intervention ([Gillies, 2005](#); [Geinger, Vandenbroeck & Roets, 2014](#)).

In a Finnish guideline on ECEC curriculum (Kaskela and Kronqvist 2007), the attachment discourse provides a resource for interpreting the child’s home experiences when the child starts to attend day care. Thus attachment is framed as a diagnostic tool of the child’s wellbeing in the process of transition from home to child care. Furthermore, in this particular publication (Kaskela and Kronqvist 2007), attachment between the child and parent provides is the reason for developing educational partnerships between the family and the educator. Within the partnership the educator tends the existing attachment between the parent and the child while the child is in day care. The educator’s role is to nurture the mother-child attachment while the parent is not present. Of course this set up raises questions about the nature of possible relationships of professionals with children. Can they attach to children the same way as parents do or their relationship with children must remain kin of ‘second grade’ to that? This formulation of attachment nicely fits within the rationales for the provision of preschool in Finland that is to provide substitute care in periods when the primary care of the home is not available and to fulfil children’s rights to *education*. Attachment is differently translated in the Australian case, where the educator’s task is, while acknowledging the parent child attachments, to form an additional secure attachment with the child to sustain the child’s wellbeing while the parent is not present. This translation of attachment theory fits in well with other discourses in which educators are valued as substitute mothers ([Ailwood, 2007](#)). A commonality between contexts in practice prescriptions is that children could bring objects or photos to ‘keep alive’ (Finnish case) or ‘remind’ (Australian case) the attachment with the parent. If

the child was upset, the educator brings those to comfort the child. In sum, the ways in which attachment is translated in to both ECEC policies prescribe a form of emotional practice adding further to arguments that describe early childhood educators' work as emotional labour (Osgood, 2004; Taggart, 2011).

The educator in both contexts is constituted as a master of attachment, who can create, assess and remediate relationships. The documents, especially the *Australian Educators Guide*, describe the process of how the educator can create this relation. The site of the home or preschool can become spaces for 'acting out' problems with parent-child attachment or where therapeutic

*So, this is a Foucauldian policy analysis that tells us that this is the world according to these policies and attempt to make that strange / unfamiliar, this is the way people are constructed, this is how they are regulated. But I wonder, what world does this analysis itself construct in turn?*

intervention might happen (see Buyse, Verschueren & Doumen, 2009; Colmer, Rutherford & Murphy, 2011). In the Finnish case, the educator visits the home to gather a picture of the attachment of the child. The educator assesses the situation with expertise and then tends this relationship in the day care, which at the same time ensures the child's wellbeing. In the Australian case, especially in relation to child protection cases, the preschool substitutes the home, and the attachments the child has there. In cases where the home attachment is insecure or lacking, in the therapeutic space of the preschool the parent might be 'remedied'. Through advice, that concerns the importance of attachment and therapy, that includes showing how to play with and read to the child, the formation of attachment is facilitated. The hope is that behaviours improve by this therapy and the parent learns to 'better' relate to the child. If not, the attachment dyad is substituted by another dyad formed between, for example, an educator or social worker and the child (e.g. Aylward, Murphy, Colmer & O'Neill, 2010 from Australia; Finnish documents Korkalainen, 2014; Lund, 2010). In this way, day care settings become therapeutic places of 'acting out', where it is

safe(r) to display or act out attachment problems and there are practices in place to remedy the issue. The day care is a place to ‘work through’ issues associated with attachment. The educator, in turn, is constructed as an expert and practitioner of attachment, who is performing this task as a professional.

### *Complex entanglements*

As we have highlighted, the transfer of attachment discourses produce educators, practice prescriptions and emotions differently in these two contexts. In Finnish documents, the day care is a place where educators tend the child-parent attachment through the day. It is not prescribed for the educator to develop an affective relationship with the child. Practices that

*I notice that out of the many possible truths foreshadowed in the analysis one is laid out here. While this ‘truth’ is at best uncertain, there is no sign of uncertainty here. Through careful interpretation ‘attachment’ reemerges in a different form, formulated to fit the politics of the authors outlined earlier.*

remind the child of their bonds with the parents, such as weaving good-bye windows, the presence of favourite home toys or family pictures aim to sustain feelings in the absence of the parent. The child’s wellbeing and learning is secured this way. In the Australian case, documents suggest strategies to educators through which they can progressively build a secure bond that helps the child operate in the day care environment in the absence of parents, and that ensures the child’s wellbeing and learning. The management of feelings accompanying the emotional tie comprise a part of professional labour in both contexts. Attachment discourses thus intersect with professional discourses of ECEC in complex ways.

While attachment emotions are developed in systematic ways in the Australian case, in Finland they are held distant from the educator, however in both cases they are part of being a professional. In the Australian case, this kind of professional emotion management is somewhat in contestation

with another discourse that considers educators of young children as amateurish enthusiasts (mothers) whose characteristic is to love children for altruistic reasons (Ailwood, 2011). According to Moyles (2010) emotions are necessary for working with young children, but having qualities for

*The major premise –the new interpretations of attachment developed in the analysis – meets here with a number of specific statements, and conclusions are drawn. I am curious about this since there is no sign of the word ‘conclusion’ (meaning a judgement reached by reasoning) as header for this section, but there are judgements laid, some of them in a quite strong tone colonizing the remaining uncertainty that was cautiously built up before.*

emotions prevent practitioners from being considered as professionals. In order to distance ECEC professionalism from this latter discourse, during the past decade agendas attached to the professionalization of ECEC called for the abandoning of traditional association of the profession with care (Taggart, 2011). Could we understand the translation of attachment discourses into the Australian context as the professionalization of the management of emotions?

Additionally, and during the same period, lifelong learning discourses also incorporated ECEC in the trajectory of learning from birth to death in both contexts (Karila, 2010; [Millei, 2008](#)). It is then not hard to see the ways in which in the Australian framework’s attachment discourses so seamlessly mix with learning discourses and agendas. Attachment is something to learn for both educators and children. Situated within this paradox of care (discourses of amateurism or professionalism) and discourses of learning, perhaps we could contest Osgood’s (2004, p. 19) argument that professionals’ “personal and emotional investments” to nurture and safeguard children happen for *only* altruistic reasons. To her humanist position, the managerialist and performative stances of policy and its prescriptions could be added in both the Finnish and Australian cases. Both Osgood (2004) and Taggart (2011, p. 88) call upon the notion of ‘ethic of care’ based on Noddings’ (1984) articulation, to contrast ‘performative’ professionalism. For Noddings’ (1984, p. 94) an ‘ethics of care’ is an internal ethical ideal “developed in congruence with



one's best remembrance of caring and being cared for". However, the managerialist and performative stances of attachment carry the danger of conflating an 'ethic of care' with subscribed normative and moral behaviours around emotions. This danger alerts us to the question, of who we – as educators of young children - have been made to become, before we are ever in a position to make further determinations about our 'ethic of care' (Butler 2004, p. 24).

When the idea of writing together about attachment came up, we did not expect that attachment discourses would have such a strong position, for example, in the municipal level guidelines in Finland. As academics educating pre-service preschool teachers and working in the framework of discursive psychology, we teach our students critical thinking and provide them with alternative perspectives on psy, including those of Foucault, Parker or poststructuralist feminist scholars referenced in this chapter. However, where does our own 'ethic of care' lie in these policy contexts that prescribe particular attachment practices for our students? What does our teaching produce within these contexts?

*I wonder what is this change in tone? What is the work that it does? What purchase does this tone have? Is this about returning to uncertainty coupled with an element of surprise and discovery, something that a Foucauldian policy analysis should perform?*

*And again, we are back in the theatre. As in the end of a story, we can return to the scenario presented at the beginning creating a circular structure and 'closure', but we are better informed now, right. In 'closure' there is a desire for a firm answer to a question or for the dissolution of ambiguity. Perhaps calling again on authority (and the knowledge and power associated with that invoked by the word 'academics') provides this 'closure' with the promise that we know now better and have the competency to deal with it.*



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<sup>i</sup> It has to be said that the Australian Commonwealth government has made a relatively large investment into ECEC during the 1970s to enable women's workforce participation and as a result of feminist movements, however these investments quickly waned by the 1980s and remains minimal until 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> The Australian terminology is very complex for different ECEC settings that also vary between states, so for ease we just refer to all settings as day care in Australia and also in Finland.

<sup>iii</sup> The Finnish Legislation on Early Childhood Education and Care  
<http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1973/19730036>

<sup>iv</sup> As Rose (1985) also explains in relation to mental testing and the constitution of the ‘normal’, the invention of mental testing set up a reciprocal dependence of ‘normality’ and ‘abnormality’, because the extensive initial examination of the abnormal set up standards for normality, and in turn the measurement of mental abilities according to the criteria of normality determined the abnormal.

<sup>v</sup> The quotation is from the official English translation of the Finnish national curriculum guidelines. However, the adjective used for stable in the original Finnish document could rather be translated as “secure”, since it refers to an emotional experience or state of an individual rather than an experience that lasts for a period of time, such a stable.

<sup>vi</sup> This quotation is also from the same document as the previous one. Again, the original Finnish document has the adjective secure, which has been translated to “warm personal”.