
The 'Work' of Community in Belonging, Being and Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

ZSUZSA MILLEI

School of Education, The University of Newcastle, Australia

JENNIFER SUMSION

School of Teacher Education, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, Australia

ABSTRACT This article articulates the appeal of different conceptualisations of community to the curriculum writers of *Belonging, Being and Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* and to the Council of Australian Governments that commissioned the Framework, and the tensions within and between those respective conceptualisations. It then traces shifts in conceptualisations of community and the work done by community across the first publicly released draft and the final version of the Framework. Attributing these shifts, at least in part, to the Rudd government's risk averseness, it concludes that despite the severely contained nature of community in the final version of the Framework, there remains space for what Rose terms 'radical ethico-politics' and for working towards a more socially just society.

Introduction

Community is one of the most pervasive and seductive terms in early childhood studies and policy making internationally, perhaps because of its potential to offer solutions to problems of modernity, such as security and freedom. As Bauman (2001, p. 16) argues, in the insecure conditions of modernity, the notion of community fulfils a longing for what is missing, a 'shelter of security'. Community 'feels good ... it is good "to have a community", "to be in a community" ... Community, we feel, is always a good thing' (Bauman, 2001, p. 1). Community in its sociological sense, where people can belong, with certainty and forever, however, is rarely available in today's globalised and individualised world (Bauman, 2001). Nevertheless, or rather as a result of this rarity, the longing for security and belonging continues to feed our hopes of experiencing community. Yet the notion of community is not without tensions. As Bauman (2001, p. 4) reminds us, to be in a 'real community' comes with the price of losing freedom or autonomy due to allegiances we owe to members of the community, thus 'gaining community, if it happens, would soon mean missing freedom'. For Rose (1999), community is a seductive solution for problems of modern government (security and freedom) for two interrelated reasons. First, community offers associations and respect for multiple identities formed through belonging to different cultures. Consequently, it offers solutions for the loneliness, insecurity and lack of confidence generated by a 'mass society'. Second, community enables a type of state regulation where freedom of associations and self-formation are respected but, at the same time, the government of citizens' conduct is ensured. Government works through the moral fields and emotional binding of communities by providing ways for 'framing of moral responsibility in terms of identity, values and belongingness' (Rose, 2000, p. 1408). Thus, community presents novel ways for the state to govern the conduct of individuals through the exertion of non-political forms of authority, seemingly independent of the

state and apparently offering the very freedom it seeks to deny. Reconciling the idea of community and freedom, therefore, is always difficult and never tension-free.

Our aim in this article is to tease out the work done by community in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009; hereafter 'the Framework'). Adding another problem of modernity – that of equality or equity, raised by the French Revolution – we are interested in tracing shifts in conceptualisations of community, and the solutions it is perceived to offer to these problems, from the first public draft of the Framework released in November 2008 to the final version approved by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in July 2009. To this end, we draw on Bauman's (2001) and Rose's (1999, 2000) articulation of the tensions inherent in community, and particularly on Rose's notion of 'ethico-politics' to explain the shifts in conceptualisations of community and to argue that within the final version of the Framework, it is possible to reclaim space for democratic politics for a more equitable society. The article takes the form of a loose chronology of the development of the Framework, interwoven with theoretically informed analyses of the shifting notions of community. In keeping with Bauman's (2001) observation that the idea of community has near universal appeal, we contend that for the curriculum writers and for the COAG alike, the notion of community afforded hopes of security for young children and, more broadly, for the longer-term security of Australian society. We suggest, however, that in many respects, there was a marked difference in the curriculum writers' and COAG's respective notions of security and community, their hopes for the work that community might do in the Framework, and the solutions it might provide. In the chronology that follows, we trace the relative ascendancy and decline of these different notions of community. Before proceeding, we provide a brief overview of our analytic methods.

A Methodological Note

In tracing the work done by community, we used two analytic methods: concept mapping, using the Leximancer text data-mining software package, and phenomenographic analysis, informed by theorisations of community.

Leximancer Concept Mapping

Leximancer performs a type of automated content and network analysis based on statistical algorithms (Smith & Humphreys, 2006).[1] By displaying information extracted in a two-dimensional visual form, it provides a 'birds [sic] eye view of the material, showing the main concepts contained within the text and how they are related' (University of Queensland, 2008, p. 5). As Leximancer concepts are 'collections of words that generally travel together throughout the text' (University of Queensland, 2008, p. 28), they are unlikely to have the complexity of meanings traditionally associated with the notion of concept in 'researcher-driven interpretative coding' (Hewett et al, 2009, p. 1735). Hence, Leximancer is not intended to replace researcher interpretation and judgment (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). It was beneficial for the initial phase of our analysis, however, because its automated nature served a 'bracketing' function that distanced us from the data (Penn-Edwards, 2010) and helped us guard against reading into the data what we anticipated seeing. The bracketing function was particularly important given the second author's key role in the development of the Framework. Figure 1 indicates the prominent concepts in the first public draft of the Framework (Version 1) [2], while Figure 2 indicates the prominent concepts in the final version (Version 3). As with all Leximancer-generated representations, the larger the dot representing the concept, the more central its location and the more prominent the concept. The lines between the concepts indicate the main semantic connections between the concepts and can be 'read' in whatever direction is most meaningful.[3]

Phenomenographic Analysis

Intrigued by the shift in the location of community in the Leximancer concept mapping, our aim in the second phase of the analysis was to identify and describe differences in conceptions of

community within and across the two versions of the Framework. Following Penn-Edwards (2010), we undertook an inductive phenomenographic-style analysis that involved identifying all instances in which 'community' appeared and manually sorting the concepts of community inferred from the ideas discussed in the surrounding text. In particular, we focused on types of communities (for example, families, wider communities, cultural communities), the work they did (for example, providing a source of knowledge and opportunities for co-learning) and the principles on which they operated (for example, reciprocity, partnerships). Our theoretical understandings of community informed this process of categorisation. In our analysis of shifts in dominant notions of community across the first and final versions, we drew, in part, on our knowledge of the political and policy context in which the Framework was created.

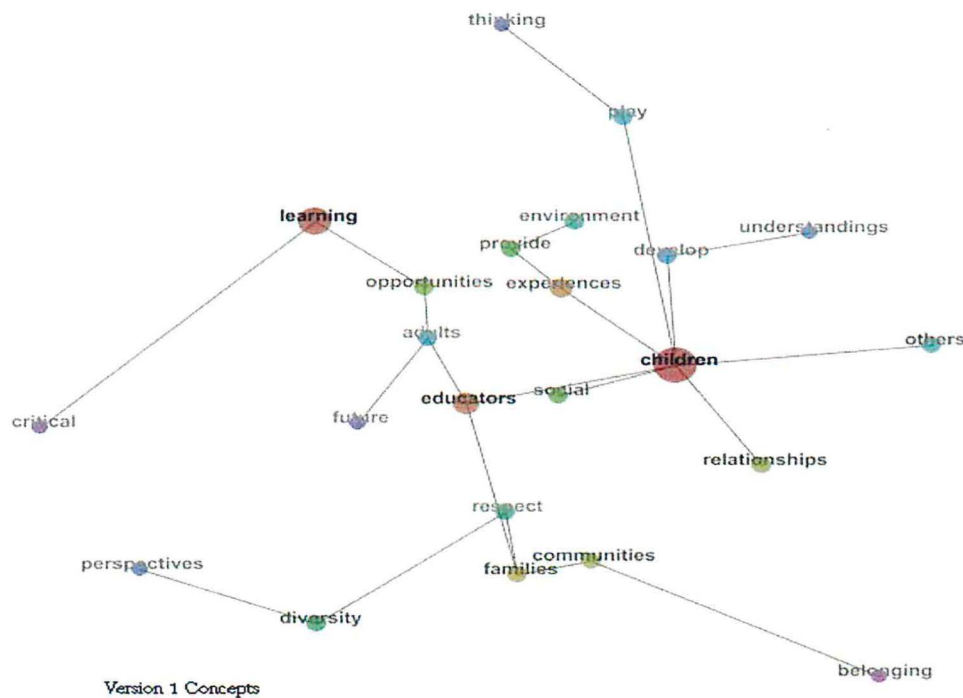


Figure 1. Leximancer-identified concepts in the first publicly released draft of the EYLF (Version 1).

Context for the Creation of the Framework

In late 2007, the Australian people voted the Australian Labor Party back into office after 11 years in opposition. The incoming prime minister, Kevin Rudd, in his first speech to Parliament as leader of the Opposition the previous year and in two widely cited articles (Rudd, 2006a, b), had outlined his social democratic vision for the country, based in part on a commitment to equity and community. Although he did not elaborate on his notion of community, his writing was imbued with words such as 'care', 'compassion', 'reciprocity', 'trust', 'justice' and 'civic commitment'. The same themes were echoed in his subsequent early prime ministerial speeches. For many Australians, Rudd seemed to promote a more principled and 'decent' society than the neo-liberalist economic policies of the previous Howard coalition government (1996-2007) had afforded (Marr, 2010).

One of Rudd's earliest acts as prime minister, for example, was to make a formal apology to the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, a highly symbolic act of national significance and reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians that his predecessor, John Howard, had refused to countenance (Marr, 2010). In his apology speech, Rudd (2008, p. 173) invoked 'a future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia', and concluded: 'Let us turn this page together ... let's grasp

this opportunity to craft a new future'. The emotional impact of his appeal to redress injustices through building a more inclusive community led Manne (2008a, p. 31), an academic and political commentator, to comment that 'in the politics of nations, there are few transcendent moments. This was one.' In a reference to the apology, even one of Rudd's most trenchant critics acknowledged the authenticity of Rudd's 'instinctive sympathy for children and for the survivors of wretched childhoods' (Marr, 2010, p. 38). To many within the early childhood sector, it seemed possible, therefore, that under the Rudd government, the concerns of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2006) about the need for Australia to have a clearer vision for early childhood education and care might be addressed and, moreover, that the vision might be one underpinned by social democratic principles of social justice.

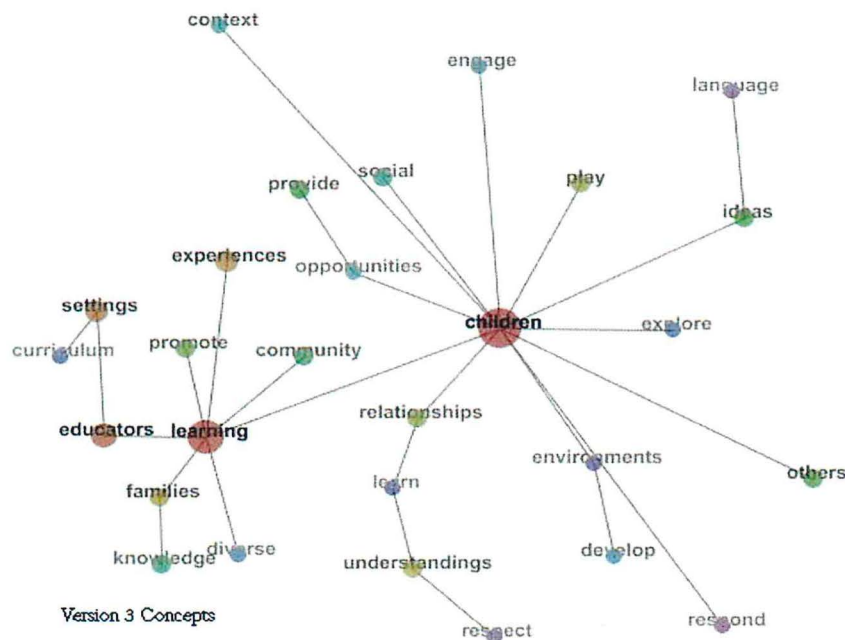


Figure 2. Leximancer-identified concepts in the final version of the EYLF ('Version 3').

The Rudd government was also elected on the promise of an ambitious platform of sweeping reform of Australia's social and economic infrastructure, including early childhood education and care. The COAG (comprising Australia's federal government, six state and two territory governments) was given responsibility for steering these reforms, an ambitious move given the long history of often acrimonious interstate and state-federal relations (Moon & Sharman, 2003).

The cross-sectoral consortium that was awarded the government tender to develop and trial the Framework comprised a mix of academics, service providers, representatives of early childhood peak organisations, consultants and practitioners from around the country (Sumsion et al, 2009). Within the consortium, a small group undertook the actual writing of the Framework (hereafter, 'the curriculum writers'). The second author of this article (Jennifer) was co-leader of the consortium and one of the curriculum writers.[4] The curriculum writers, along with other consortium members, were committed to demonstrating respect for diversity and difference in standpoints and perspectives, which they considered crucial to imbue in the Framework, while working to a common purpose and shared goal of advancing social justice. Like many within the early childhood sector, the writers were buoyed by the election of the federal Labor government that proclaimed a socially progressive agenda, and by promising signs of the new government's interest in fostering democratic engagement at a community level.[5] They were hopeful that the COAG would embrace a national early years learning framework constructed around social democratic ideas about community and an explicit commitment to social justice.

The First Version of the Framework: possibilities for democratic politics

The first publicly available draft of the Framework was released in November 2008.[6] The Leximancer-generated concept map of the draft Framework (Figure 1) locates 'communities' in a cluster of concepts along with 'families', 'belonging', 'respect', 'diversity' and 'perspectives'. These concepts are connected to 'children' through 'educators', appearing as if children's experiences (of families, belonging, respect, and so on) were mediated by the 'educators' in ways that contributed to developing new understandings. Figure 1 also positions educators as mediating children's learning more broadly. Interestingly, in the final version of the Framework, the position of 'educators' is reconfigured to become less central (see Figure 2). In Figure 2, 'children' and 'educators' are connected through 'learning', and 'community' is also connected to 'learning' rather than to 'educators'. Thus, 'learning' becomes a more prominent concept and the main endeavour (rather than, for example, relationship building) becomes connecting children and educators.

The positioning of communities in Figure 1, when read through our phenomenographic analysis, conveys a focus on relationships, inclusiveness and social reciprocity, and the 'ethical dimensions of teaching, learning and relationships in early childhood settings' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008, p. 4). This idea is further explicated in the vision articulated in the first version of the Framework to create places in early years settings that are based on 'reciprocal relationships' and the mutual 'obligation of being together', and where children feel they belong. The Framework delineates a concept of community that reflects 'friendly and welcoming places' where both adults and children benefit from community life. They are also places where the future is being built based on 'fairness, democratic principles, reciprocal rights and obligations, equality of opportunity, improving equity and overcoming social disadvantage' (p. 4). The Framework's vision unquestionably states that educators' 'obligation' is to 'achieve equity and social inclusion' through the enactment of children's rights (p. 4). It advocates for diversity in perspectives and the discussion and deployment of diverse perspectives in practice.

Through proposing democratic principles based on 'Australian democratic traditions', it urges early childhood educators, children, families and communities to work 'together to create a just and fair society' (p. 5). At its core, therefore, we argue that the first version of the Framework adopts a position of 'transforming society' which rests on the belief and possibility to create a better world that extends 'possibilities for justice in public life' (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 182). Hence, the first version of the Framework offers a solution to create 'communities in which all participants – children, educators and families – are welcomed, feel a sense of belonging and are active, valued contributors' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008, p. 6), challenge bias (p. 5) and create 'socially just solutions to unjust situations' (p. 6).

It is proposed in the first version of the Framework that in these communities, consultation with children takes place, children's perspectives in decisions are accounted for and acted upon, and that their contributions to community and their agency are facilitated, respected and responded to. The Framework positions early childhood settings as sites for politics to 'transform society'. The educator appears as an agent of politics who is reflective about 'issues associated with power, control and social justice' (p. 12), as the Leximancer reading implies. For example, when discussing play, the document places it in 'a space for politics and power relations, where children are excluded on the basis of gender, age, size, skin colour, proficiency with English, class, ethnicity, sexuality and more' (p. 8). It prescribes that the role of the educator is to 'work with children to challenge power assumptions and create play experiences that promote equity, fairness and justice' (p. 8).

In sum, on the one hand, the community of early childhood settings is imagined as 'friendly and welcoming places' (p. 4) based on reciprocal relationships, where children belong and which offer security for children. On the other hand, in this community, a space is opened for democratic politics based on children's participation and consultation in the present, with an outward political agenda emphasising equity and justice; put simply, a politics for transforming society. Our question is, however, what kind of politics is possible, through communities, that can also build on security – in this case, the obligations that come with being together and the allegiances we owe to each other? Or, in other words, does finding commonalities and creating a 'friendly' community for

children allow for a politics that is based on dissensus and achieving a more just society? Is it possible to understand 'Australian democratic traditions' in the same way: as a democracy that is just and fair for all? Does justice, or working in ways that promote justice, mean the same for all community members? Is what is considered 'fair' also considered 'just'?

Politics of Recognition, Discursive and Deliberative Democracy

Habermas (1989) offers answers that are useful in considering these questions in relation to the Framework. His conceptualisation of community uses the notion of 'communicative action', which forms the basis of a kind of 'discursive democracy' in communities. Communication, for Habermas, works at two levels: as a medium of social integration and as a means to reconcile conflict. Habermas argues that whenever actors engage in any kind of 'communicative action', they orient themselves towards 'reaching an understanding'. Hence, discussing the same issue with a common understanding becomes possible. He terms this the first level of communication. 'Communicative action' consequently also includes the possibility of a shared conception of truth, justice, ethics and politics. The capacity to deliberate over missing consensus in communicative modes constitutes the second level of communication. This is the reflective and critical dimension of communication, which is presupposed in everyday life but, at the same time, as Habermas argues, in actuality is removed from it. As Habermas explains further, capitalism colonised the everyday life of modern societies and therefore opportunity for actors to use their critical and rational competence for 'discursive democracy' is increasingly being denied.

Habermas, according to Dahlberg & Moss (2005, p. 152), believes 'in the possibility of rational consensus arrived at through free, unconstrained public deliberation between free and equal citizens'. Resonating with this notion, the first version of the Framework also opens up the everyday life of early childhood settings for discursive negotiations, and mobilises educators and children to 'be a catalyst for reflection, dialogue, critique, debate and discussion' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008, p. 4). Communicative actions inherently work towards consensus, but consensus always necessitates some form of pressure. In order to neutralise these pressures, Habermas proposes a 'democratic constitutional state', where cultural variety is upheld and the protection of the individual/citizen of the state from both anti-communal and communal pressures is provided as the preliminary condition. As Habermas (1994, p. 125) argues: 'a politics of recognition ... protects the integrity of the individual in the life contexts in which his or her identity is formed'. In this vein, the Framework also recognises children's right 'to enjoy and express their own culture, practice their religion and use their home languages' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008, p. 6). In sum, Habermas, by drawing on discursive negotiations and the politics of recognition, conceptualises a community that is always in emergence and is never finished, since continuous negotiations are necessary to arrive at what is shared (Delanty, 2003).

Conceptualising community as a 'democratic constitutional state' coupled with the politics of recognition offers solutions for honouring and protecting the integrity of the individual and his or her belongings to communities of his or her choice, and in this way provides a form of security. Tensions, however, remain between the notion of 'community' that is based on some sort of common understanding of truth, justice, ethics and politics, and a kind of politics that strives for a diverse set of views and acknowledges the existence of dissensus. This tension leads us to the following question: How far-reaching is the utility of thinking with the concept of 'community' as based on 'communicative action' in creating an alternative society? Does this instead contribute to a vision of a normative alternative society and, as such, merely posit what ought to be the case?

The answer is found somewhat differently again to our question in the notion of 'deliberative democracy', because communicative action will typically have a discourse attached to it, while 'deliberative democracy' (Dryzek, 1990) has a strong procedural assumption. This means that all democratic acts must proceed via the democratic structures in place, thus making them valid and legitimate acts. Dryzek's conceptualisation of deliberative democracy emphasises the importance of democratic procedures in consultative processes at early childhood settings. However, these processes' aim to arrive at consensus still remains. Habermas has been critiqued on a number of

counts, not the least of which has to do with the depoliticisation via consensus. He has also been critiqued for his attempt to create a single and uniform version of rationality and rational discourse. In this context, however, for both Habermas and Dryzek, consensus through rational deliberation is the most important aspect of democratic theory and, therefore, their conceptualisations only partly help our search for a democratic politics in early childhood settings.

When Consensus Is Not Enough: agonistic pluralism

Chantal Mouffe (1992, 2000) offers an alternative in emphasising the importance of the contest of politics over the possible resolution of the issue at hand. For example, Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is concerned with maintaining a politicised discourse, rather than a focus on consensus. In Mouffe's view, this would mean that it is much more important to deal with those issues that are not reducible to a set of agreed-upon conditions of existence, a discourse or solution to a problem. For instance, the democratic process itself is a place in which radical difference, indeed irreconcilable difference, ought to be made apparent and contested. This contest need not drive towards an agreed-upon end in which there is a 'victor' through some kind of election campaign and vote tally, nor does it need to have a solution in place in which all 'subjects' of that decision are somehow covered by the rules and procedures. For Mouffe, deliberations involving some form of discussion are about the continued 'reality' of the perpetual political conflict in contemporary plural societies. Those discussions are necessarily formed by contesting perspectives and 'realities'. In this way, as advocated in the first version of the Framework, working with 'diverse theoretical perspectives in planning for and guiding children's learning, and in reflecting critically on curriculum decisions' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008, p. 4) that have implications for equity is essential in maintaining the contest of politics in early childhood settings. We would, however, also raise the importance of including perspectives of families and children in these contestations.

This position of agonism, or agonistic pluralism, is profoundly different to the notion of deliberative democratic practice, as well as the Habermasian view of communicative action. In agonistic pluralism, decisions need not have specific outcomes in which the rules are defined and deposited in ways in which they can be instrumentalised and kept unchanged. Democracy and democratic practice ought to be about the expressions of disagreement, rather than agreement. Further, Mouffe (1992) has maintained that social movements, and those that reject their material conditions, will not find solace in 'better material conditions': thus rejecting the Marxist solution. For us, this means that one way to think about documents such as the Framework, and individuals producing intellectual positions on the place of curriculum for children in early childhood settings, is to demonstrate the different rationalities, the different sets of understandings, which children might use regarding their material worlds, including children's own understandings. It also demonstrates how sharing values and the production of a consensual world view may not be the necessary goal of the Framework.

The COAG's Response to the First Version of the Framework

While we are not entirely certain that these possibilities offered in the first version of the Framework for 'discursive', 'deliberative' and 'agonistic' democracies in the communities of early childhood settings were the explicit aim of the curriculum writers, the COAG was quick to tame the first version of the Framework. We attribute this taming, in part, to the Rudd government's risk aversion. These risks were of several kinds.

Within a year of its election, for example, the Rudd government was facing increasing criticism that, despite its ambitious rhetoric, it had few concrete achievements to show for its first 12 months in office (Manne, 2008b). Of the broad range of reforms across sectors, the Early Childhood Education and Care Reform Agenda was widely considered to be the furthest advanced in what was subsequently described as the COAG's 'reform logjam' (Hepworth & Kitney, 2010). Moreover, within that agenda, the development of the Framework, a lynchpin of the proposed new National Quality Standard for Australian Early Childhood Education and Care, was the

furthest advanced component (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008).

Politically, therefore, the Rudd government had a great deal at stake in the Early Years Learning Framework and in securing its successful passage through the multi-tiered, multi-jurisdictional approval process to ensure sign-off by the relevant ministers (of the education, health and/or community services portfolios) of all federal, state and territory departments. Political urgency most likely accounted for the extremely short timeline for the actual development and trial of the Framework (Sumsion et al, 2009). Accompanying and complicating that urgency was the federal government's increasing risk averseness (Marr, 2010).

The risk of being seen by the electorate as unable to manage its reform agenda was just one of those facing the Rudd government with respect to the Framework. A second and related risk involved the inherently political and contested nature of curriculum development, given that curriculum is a public statement about what a society values and what it hopes to become (Reid, 2008). As noted previously, the COAG's vision, evident in its 2008 discussion paper (Early Childhood Development Sub-Group of the Productivity Agenda Working Group), was strongly conditioned by dominant national and international policy discourses about human and social capital development, with occasional glimpses of social democratic discourses. Interestingly, unlike the reports of consultations on other components of the COAG's Early Childhood Education and Care Reform Agenda, feedback from the consultations on the first draft of the Framework was not made publicly available – perhaps suggesting a degree of concern by government about the direction which the first draft of the Framework appeared to be taking.

The third risk for the Rudd government was the media response to drafts of the Framework. The two publicly released draft versions of the Framework invoked a sensationalised, highly critical response from an influential national broadsheet daily newspaper, further inflamed through its state-based tabloid subsidiaries and their online forums. Particular ire was directed at constructions of children as active participants in their communities. Subject to especially vehement attack were suggestions in the first draft of the Framework that children can be actively involved in promoting fairness and challenging inequities and injustices within the context of daily life in early childhood settings.

These threefold risks that the Rudd government had to address in order to maintain its standing with the electorate constrained possibilities for the Framework, containing it to a relatively narrow agenda: that the Framework should contribute to building a stronger, and more secure, community and be based on the following 'values':

the international rights of children; respect, compassion and empathy for all; promoting social inclusion; recognising Indigenous cultures and identities; the agency of children (which acknowledges the voices of children as active members of society); and a strong partnership between parents, professionals, families and communities. (Early Childhood Development Sub Group, 2008, p. 35)

While these 'values' might loosely be described as reflecting a participatory, social justice orientation, much of the remainder of the discussion paper was framed strongly in terms of human and social capital development, exemplified in statements such as the following: 'Investing in early childhood, including through quality early childhood education and care, benefits individuals, our community and the economy' (Early Childhood Development Sub Group, 2008, p. 2). Whether there was any awareness within the COAG of the internal tensions in its discussion paper, and in the notions of community conveyed, is unknown. The ways in which the COAG's agenda has been achieved in the Framework is addressed in the next section.

The 'Pruned' Final Version of the Framework

As Figure 2 illustrates, in the Leximancer-generated concept map of the final version of the Framework, 'community' appears as a relatively isolated concept with only one direct connection – to 'learning'. Indirectly, it is connected to 'children' and 'educators', with a weaker link to 'families', 'knowledge', 'promote' and 'diverse'. In each case the connection is through 'learning'. The following quote provides a good example of how these connections are represented in the final version of the Framework. The quote is from the 'Vision for Children's Learning' section of

the document: 'From before birth children are connected to *family, community, culture and place*. Their earliest development and *learning* takes place through these *relationships*, particularly within *families*, who are children's first and most influential *educators*' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 7; our emphasis).

A theme that our phenomenographic analysis identified is the idea that communities, and the knowledge, tradition and culture they carry, and early years settings are linked to each other through children's familial belongings. In the final version of the Framework, this link was interpreted narrowly to focus only on facilitating children's learning:

Children are born *belonging* to a culture, which is not only influenced by traditional practices, heritage and ancestral knowledge, but also by the experiences, values and beliefs of individual families and communities. Respecting diversity means within the curriculum valuing and reflecting the practices, values and beliefs of families. ... When early childhood educators respect the diversity of families and communities, and the aspirations they hold for children, they are able to foster children's motivation to learn and reinforce their sense of themselves as competent learners. (p. 13)

The theme of belonging to communities frequently appears in the final version of the Framework and encourages educators to make curriculum relevant to, and to draw from the knowledge, experiences, beliefs and values of, each local community to promote children's learning (p. 8). It is done by educators, as the Framework explains, to deliver learning outcomes efficiently (p. 16) and to make children confident learners with the 'right' dispositions and aspirations (pp. 13, 31, 34, 37) by recognising community experiences and associated learning styles (p. 31). The need to consider particular modes of communication (p. 8) is also highlighted, but instead of fostering children's capacities to participate in a democracy, it is to develop children as 'effective communicators' (Outcome 5, pp. 38-42).

Community also figures in the final version of the Framework as a source of identity where '[c]hildren learn about themselves and construct their own identity within the context of their families and communities' (p. 22). An important part of children's identity construction as presented here is their sense as learners, and their dispositions to and inspirations for learning. Communities, thus, are used to fortify children's notion about themselves as 'effective learners', attached to a particular approach to learning.

Educators working in partnership or collaboration with communities 'to find equitable and effective ways to ensure that all children have opportunities to achieve learning outcomes' (p. 13) is another theme of the final version of the Framework. The partnership of children with communities, as it appears in the document, extends to areas of rights and responsibilities, forming a kind of civic space for children. In this space, children can 'participate in decisions that affect them' but only with an immediate qualifier attached to the statement: 'including their learning' (p. 9), and among other rights, to have the 'right to be a child and experience the joy of childhood' (p. 20). Thus, the political space opened up by the first version of the Framework is tamed; it became apolitical since it only encompasses 'learning' and 'joyful' children. Children's responsibilities in this civic space are to respect the rights of others (p. 22), to be responsible 'for their own learning, personal regulation and contribution to the social environment' (p. 33), and to align themselves with community protocols that are relevant to their lives and their local communities. These responsibilities and learning '[o]ver time ... transforms the ways they interact with others' (p. 25).

Further reinforcing community as an apolitical place for children, when the document addresses educators' or children's role in building these communities, they appear as 'learning communities' (for educators [p. 13] and for children [p. 15]). This apolitical space, however, has an important task: to engage children in active participation in 'learning communities'. Through their active participation they become 'civilised' to act and be in particular ways; in other words, protocols of communities shape children's conduct towards desired ends. Through this civilising process, children understand and learn their rights and perform their responsibilities; learn to respect diversity; become aware of fairness; and 'become socially responsible and show respect for the environment' (p. 26). In sum, children are engaged in a fundamentally different way in 'learning communities'. They are moralised through making them responsible to learn and to become and be particular kinds of learners.

Communitarian Community: the moral voice

The importance that the final version of the Framework places on the idea that identity is constituted through belonging to the community and the moral reasoning it produces captures an understanding that resonates with a communitarian notion of community. Communitarian theorists such as Charles Taylor (1990, 1994) stress that there is no such thing as the 'unencumbered self', which liberalism champions with its rational moral subject free from ties to traditional morals of communities. The individual, therefore, is a kind of embodiment of community, which has shaped his and her desires, values and purposes. Communitarians strive to restore a moral voice to society that is based on tradition. Most communitarian theorists, and, we propose, perhaps the dominant notions of community in the final version of the Framework, understand 'community' as tied to tradition.

The idea that an individual embodies a particular moral reasoning gained from the traditions of his or her community has profound implications for justice. Communitarians argue for a political community that gives way to particular and local theories of justice linked to participating communities. Theories of justice originating in communities bound by tradition, however, arguably reinstate power differences between groups – for example, what we could call 'traditional' gender roles. Communitarian understanding of justice, therefore, conflicts with a universalist theory of justice, such as the equality and freedom of all human beings. Critiques of the communitarian position on justice also emphasise that this type of justice can have both conservative (for example, retaining traditional gender roles) and authoritarian implications (emphasising duties and responsibilities over rights and entitlements). As Bauman (1993) explains, 'difference' in communitarian understandings stands for the group's power to limit individual freedom, unlike in the liberal idea where 'difference' stands for individual freedom. In this way, communitarian theories have not been accompanied by a view of community as transformative of society, but rather as an avenue to retain traditional roles and power relations in society (Delanty, 2003). In relation to the Framework, the understanding of 'identity' that is constituted on the grounds of belonging to communities, while supportive of perspectives held in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (Martin, 2005), can have the danger of acting against universalist notions of justice and potentially sustain traditionally bound power relations between groups of people.

The Framework as a Solution to Governing Children

As the final version of the Framework states: 'children are born *belonging* to a culture' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 13; original emphasis) and '[c]hildren learn about themselves and construct their own identity within the context of their families and communities' (p. 20). The concept of community, here, has the capacity to collectivise identities in multiple communities. At the same time, the Framework ensures respect for having, choosing to acknowledge, or forming these allegiances and identities, hence the individual's freedom to belong to cultures is maintained. Belonging to communities is based on individuals' structural (familial or institutional) or symbolic associations – centre enrolment or job, kinship, culture, locality or nationality, and learning – with the different communities. It is important to state here, however, that choice in having, acknowledging or forming these associations is not always an option, especially for children (Millei & Imre, 2009).

As we have outlined in our phenomenographic analysis of the final version of the Framework, the document constitutes community as an apolitical space. Being a civic space that is assumedly free of state political power does not mean being free of politics, according to Rose (1999, 2000), because children and educators in this civic space are engaged in a powerful game of politics, which Rose (1999, p. 188) terms a 'community-civility game'. As he explains, this 'game' of power seeks to act on the ethical formation and self-management of individuals through the community in order to deliver its civilising program – that is, for individuals to acquire certain community-based morals. The final version of the Framework, in this way, by utilising notions of community and the 'learning community' in particular, outlines a minimum set of core values, ethics and behavioural rules desirably shared by all, which is focused on learning. For example, the Framework prescribes particular ways to be 'efficient' learners based on a neo-liberal set of values

and characteristics of subjectivity (Fendler, 2001), such as 'engage independently with tasks' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 22) or be 'active participants and decision makers' (p. 9), and be 'able to transfer and adapt [learning] from one context to the other' (p. 33). It also stipulates the 'right' disposition to learning: 'curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity' (p. 34). It facilitates the development of children's motivation to learning or, in other words, for children to strive to learn as their prime responsibility (p. 33). The Framework also engages children to self-regulate and monitor the nature of their learning through self-reflection and participating in their own assessment. For example, and as the document states: children 'can develop an understanding of themselves as learners and an understanding of how they learn best' (p. 17) through assessing their own learning. Through this form of normalisation and self-crafting, children are regulated to continuously monitor and improve themselves and their selves, and, according to Rose (1989), to be 'enterprising individuals' and lifelong learners. This is a regulation of children without direct teacher or state control, but through the inculcation of a particular ethics to learning and a moral standard to be a particular kind of learner.

As Rose (2000, p. 1403) argues by using Etzioni's (1997) words on community: 'The moral voice of community "is the main way that individuals and groups in a good society encourage one another to adhere to behavior that reflects shared values and to avoid behavior that offends or violates them"'. In our case, a particular learning ethic, as positioned by the Framework in relation to 'learning communities', makes learning something to adhere to without direct state interference. At the same time, the 'learning community' is constituted as the target for the governing of conduct, through which the regulation of members' conduct and self-creation becomes possible. This is what Rose (1999, p. 176) terms 'government through community' and he defines regulating individuals in this way as ethico-politics.

Among the curriculum writers' aims had been to create a space for children where they can feel secure due to the emotional bonds developed between children, educators and the communities to which they belong. They had also sought to create communities for children that ensure children's democratic participation at present in their communities to make them just and fair places now and in the future. We contend that due, in large part, to the Rudd government's risk aversion, these aims were mostly pruned from the Framework. The document's outward political mandate was seriously tamed or contained by turning it into a tokenistic kind of 'politics of recognition'. Therefore, we argue that, as a result, the document became a site of ethico-politics that governs children on more insidious levels. We maintain Rose's (2000, p. 1409) assertion and adapt it to the final version of the Framework: that the document 'seeks to inscribe norms of self-control more deeply into the soul of each citizen than is thought possible through either disciplinary technologies such as mass schooling or social technologies such as those of welfare states'.

Being a technology of government, the document maintains individual freedom in the form of free choice of belonging to multiple communities. The possession of hybrid and multiple identities is also seemingly ensured, thus the Framework maintains individual freedom. Belonging to communities potentially also provides shelter from insecure conditions in an individualised mass society. However, the very freedom and community are utilised and targeted by forms of government to deliver all-encompassing regulation that enters into what children can do, the realm of who children are, who they can become, and in what ways they can understand and constitute themselves.

In this part of our analysis we have presented a stark view. However, Rose (1999, p. 196) concludes by offering some hope for optimism through introducing the notion of 'radical ethico-politics'. Much like Mouffe (2005) in *On the Political*, Rose advocates the existence of non-essentialised communities that work on the notion of an ethic of creativity. Both Mouffe and Rose are concerned with micropolitics as opposed to the attempt to form consensus. Radical ethico-politics, then, involves the way in which a normative position about politics develops dissensus and maintains a focus on the way in which 'groups' or 'communities' can hold a view and espouse values that are not part of a majority view. It is this way that Mouffe seeks to halt extremism. Rose's approach is grounded in two different thinkers converging on the same problematic. Agamben (1993), in *The Coming Community*, and Nancy (1991), in *The Inoperative Community*, both

discuss the 'return' to 'community values', and both discuss this in terms of a decline of community bonds and the need for the development of intimate human relationships in everyday life as a counter to modern alienation. Agamben and Nancy, in their respective critiques, also realise the mythical nature of this 'past community' as well as the notion of 'return' being a useful one for the establishment of community bonds on a small scale. Rose (1999, p. 196) imagines community, based on this ethic of creativity, that would bring new 'forms of collectivization that create ... new types of non-individuated subjectivity', which is neither based on a common truth nor on one's individual and collective identity. This type of collectivity would exceed the homogenising tendencies of communities and the instrumental use of freedom they offer. Freedom is thus to be found in the guarantee of the community bond, rather than the coercive nature of consensual freedom in mass society, which demands conformity.

Concluding Thoughts

In keeping with Bauman's (2001) observation that the idea of community has near universal appeal, we contend that for the curriculum writers and for the COAG alike, the notion of community afforded hopes of security for young children and, more broadly, for the longer-term security of Australian society. In many respects, however, we suggest that the notions of security held by the curriculum writers and the COAG differed, as did their notions of community and their hopes for the work that community might do in the Framework.

We have argued that the curriculum writers had hopes of a framework that would generate secure – or, to paraphrase Bauman (2001, p. 14), 'warm' and 'comfortable' – places for children, as they live their lives in the present, in early childhood settings. Elsewhere (Sumsion et al, 2009), they have made clear, however, that they opposed notions of a secure community grounded in 'sameness' and dependent on 'vigilance, fortification and defence' against difference (Bauman, 2001, p. 14). Rather, we contend, they saw children's security, in the present and future, in terms of our collective capacity to achieve a more just and, therefore, more secure society than we have currently. Thus, their intent, we suggest, was a curriculum framed around principles of 'democratic politics' (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) and perhaps a 'radical ethico-politics' (Rose, 1999).

We have outlined particular conceptualisations of 'community' that themes identified from the Framework presented to us. We have warned about drawing upon commonality, in the form of consensus, as a binding force of community, thus offering a similar critique to Bauman's scepticism and Rose's and Mouffe's critiques. Bauman (2001) sees 'violent negotiations' that overpower certain groups of people, or the lack of those in communities of 'sameness', as if 'sameness' was achieved through 'smashing' or excluding particular positions during a forceful act. He argues that the hard-earned sameness can only be 'attained (if at all) at the end of a long and tortuous labour of argument and persuasion and in strenuous competition with an indefinite number of other potentialities' (Bauman, 2001, p. 14). Consequently, Bauman also implies that 'potentialities' are lost in these 'violent negotiations'. In order to overcome this problem, he envisages only one way to conceptualise community:

it can only be (and needs to be) a community woven together from sharing and mutual care; a community of concern and responsibility for the equal right to be human and the equal ability to act on that human right. (Bauman, 2001, pp. 149-150)

Bauman argues for a postmodern ethics where the identity of the self is not constituted on grounds of belonging to a community that excludes the other. He calls upon a postmodern ethics that must live up to uncertainty and construct identity on these grounds.

Having almost reached our conclusion, we have to question ourselves as authors about our motivations for focusing on community. Have we done so because 'we miss security, a quality crucial to happy life, but one which the world we inhabit is ever less able to offer and ever more reluctant to promise' (Bauman, 2001, p. 144)? For Bauman, community is an illusion. Yet, like others, we search hard for 'community' because, in a sociological sense, it is hard to find in real life. For us, a community that has the potential to fulfil our dreams of a secure life for children remains largely missing from the final Framework document as well, and therefore our longing stays with us. Bauman argues that in order to fulfil our longing for community, we have to think about two tasks that counter the pathologies of an individuated society: first, 'equality of resources necessary

to recast the fate of individuals ... into the capacities of individuals ... and second, collective insurance against individual incapacities and misfortunes' (Bauman, 2001, p. 149). According to Bauman, these are the two tasks performed by communities and their most important aspects.

Although, inevitably, we are disappointed with some aspects of the Framework and question whether, in places, it is more consistent with a neo-liberal government agenda than a socially progressive one, we believe that it potentially offers a valuable starting point for important conversations, debate and action. We hope that this article will open up possibilities beyond what are immediately apparent in the actual text of the Framework for those who seek to use it in indisputably socially progressive ways.

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Notes

- [1] Leximancer calculates the frequency (absolute and relative) of use of the words in the texts; the strength of the connections between words (the extent to which words co-occur); and similarities in the contexts in which those connections occur (Smith & Humphreys, 2006; Hewett et al, 2009).
- [2] We did not analyse the second of the two public-released drafts of the Framework (Version 2).
- [3] For example, in Figure 1, the main semantic connection between children and the environment appears to be that the environment assists children to 'develop'. In Figure 2, the implication is that the environment provides experiences for children, a broader notion than in Figure 1. Similarly, Figure 1 suggests that educators focus primarily on children's learning, and on the curriculum, which is mediated by the early childhood setting, whereas in Figure 2, educators appear to have a broader and more prominent role.
- [4] While Jennifer is therefore able to speak from an insider's perspective, to the extent that contractual confidentiality agreements permit, she does not claim to speak on behalf of the consortium or the other curriculum writers. The ideas expressed here, and elsewhere in this article, are her interpretation of events.
- [5] Within its first 100 days in office, the Rudd government introduced two initiatives to promote community participation: a 'Community Cabinet', with meetings of government ministers held around Australia, and the Australia 2020 Summit, which involved 1000 participants gathering at Parliament House to generate ideas and strategies for government (Australian Government, n.d.).
- [6] The first version of the Framework was deleted from the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' website immediately following national consultations about the draft, but can be accessed at:
http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcaa/earlyyears/COAG_EYL_Framework20081113.pdf

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ZSUZSA MILLEI is a Lecturer in Early Childhood and Comparative Education in the School of Education at The University of Newcastle, Australia. Her research is located in an interdisciplinary field of sociology, politics and education, and examines the ways in which ideologies and contemporary governance constitute the subjects of early childhood education. Based in comparative frameworks and individual case studies, her published work explores early childhood curriculum and pedagogical discourses under different political ideological regimes, early childhood policies and initiatives, and the use of political concepts in education. Her recently published edited book, titled *Re-theorizing Discipline in Education: problems, politics, and possibilities* (Peter Lang, 2010), rethinks the 'problem' of discipline in education by making it the focus of social science inquiries. *Correspondence:* Zsuzsa Millei, School of Education, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia (zsuzsanna.millei@newcastle.edu.au).

JENNIFER SUMSION is Foundation Professor of Early Childhood Education at Charles Sturt University, Australia, where she is also a Research Leader in the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education. Her research focuses broadly on workforce capacity building and 'quality' in early childhood education and early childhood policy. Her research is supported by a range of external funding bodies, including the Australian Research Council. In 2008-09, Jennifer was co-leader (with colleague Linda Harrison) of the national consortium that led the development of *Belonging, Being and Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. *Correspondence:* Jennifer Sumsion, School of Teacher Education, Charles Sturt University, Panorama Avenue, Bathurst, New South Wales 2795, Australia (jsumsion@csu.edu.au).