# Incredible Parenting with *Incredible Years*?: A Foucauldian Analysis of New Zealand Government Perspectives on Parenting and their Implications for Parents and Educators in Early Childhood Education

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## Abstract

This paper takes a post-structural approach, examining what and how issues are framed in the parenting policy, *Incredible Years*, through Foucault's (1977, 1980, 1991, 2003, 2004) notion of *governmentality* and *discursive normalisation* . By unpacking discourses of parenting produced by *Incredible Years* as an accepted parenting programme, it aims to reveal the *norm* of parenting that is promoted by the current system, and explores how this concept of *truth* in parenting influences the everyday life of families. The critical analysis of *Incredible Years* shows that the programme (re)produces the economic/neoliberal discourses as the normal/desirable norm of parenting, thus maintaining/reinforcing the existing power relations in society. The author argues that this notion of a curriculum for parents provides only a limited understanding of the issue, and intensifies inequality and injustice in the milieu. This paper aims to provide the insights for reconceptualising our understanding of *parenting* for future policy decisions and effective pedagogy.

## Keywords

Incredible Years, Parenting Policy, Post-structuralism, Foucault, Early Childhood Education, (GERM)

## Introduction

Over the last 30 years, neoliberalism has become a new meta-narrative across the globe and contexts (Kaščák & Pupala, 2011). As global education reform movement and neoliberalism pervaded society on a global scale, the notion of neoliberalism found its foothold in New Zealand. Under the *shared goal* of economic competitiveness and prosperity, New Zealand has undergone an uncompromising reform process of economic and social policies (Roberts, 2007). A larger portion of governments' fiscal responsibilities in the education, health and welfare sectors has been transferred to individuals, identifying them as private beneficiaries and consumers of these services (Roberts, 2004, 2007; Roberts & Codd, 2010). This political climate has brought significant changes to New Zealand early child education policies, redefining what and how children ought to learn. While New Zealand early childhood has prided itself for its socio-cultural and play-based curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the persistent pull of the global education reform movement (GERM) has continued to

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subtly re-course its direction. Between 1994 and 2014, parents and children have experienced radical changes, both in educational contexts and in their everyday lives, as these policy shifts have influenced society's perspectives on desirable parenting and the responsibilities of individuals (Farquhar & White, 2014). A very particular and rigid model of parenting is identified within policy changes: self-managing, economically sound, and functional individuals who are in control of their children's education and well-being (Bae, 2015, 2016).

New Zealand Government's implementation of parenting programmes such as *PAFT - Parents As First Teachers* (Ministry of Social Development, 2006) and *Incredible Years* (IY) (Ministry of Education, 2009) is a good example of this. *Incredible Years,* in particular, has been promoted strongly by the centre-right National government since the introduction of the programme in 2009. Although trials of the programme in North Island and South Island had not yet been completed, the Ministry of Education made an announcement in December 2009 to expand the programme from 1000 parents to 3000 parents per year by 2012. The Ministry of Education (2014) claimed that these government initiatives support parents "to build positive relationships with their children and develop strategies to manage problem behaviour" (para. 2). Since the *Incredible Years* (IY) programme's introduction in 2009, the National government's target has become even higher: 12,000 parents were to participate by 2014 (Collins, 2011).

Drawing on Foucault's notions of discursive normalisation and governmentality (Foucault, 1977, 1980, 2014; Foucault, Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991), and aspects of post-structural and decolonising research, the author seeks to disrupt the concept of 'truth' in New Zealand early years parenting. The purpose of this project is to unpack the values and assumptions that underpin the implementation of IY as an accepted parenting programme in New Zealand, and to explore the implications of the discourse of positive parenting for parents' and children's lives. This article begins with an overview of *Incredible Years* programme, and Foucault's notions of discursive normalisation and governmentality, which is followed by analysis of the norm of modern parenting (re)produced by discourses in IY.

## Incredible Years Programme

Based on cognitive behaviour psychology and social learning theory, the IY programme was initially developed by a clinical psychologist and nurse practitioner, Professor Emeritus Carolyn Webster-Stratton, and her colleagues at the University of Washington's Parenting Clinic (The Incredible Years®, 2013a) as a parent training course 'to prevent and to treat' children's conduct problems in the United States (Advisory Group on Conduct Problems, 2011; Borden, Schultz, Herman, & Brooks, 2010; Robertson, 2014; Sturrock & Gray, 2013; The Incredible Years®, 2013a; Webster-Stratton, 2013). The programme offers various parent, teacher and child training courses that address conduct problems. In line with the topic of this study, this analysis focuses on a parent training aspect of the programme.

The premise behind the course is giving parents insights into *positive* parenting principles may support them to change their own behaviours towards their children, thus altering the problem behaviours of the children in these families by modifying the interaction patterns between children and parents (The Incredible Years®, 2013a; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2010).

Presenting reports of various clinical trials as evidence (Robertson, 2014; Sturrock & Gray, 2013; Webster-Stratton, 2013; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2010), the developers and the supporters of IY argue that the programme is an efficient tool to prevent "predictable negative consequences" such as violence, delinquency, and substance abuse by these children in

adolescence and adulthood (Borden et al., 2010, p. 223). However, this argument warrants careful consideration, as evidence-based approaches can be criticised for the gap they leave in our knowledge of the reality of the daily lives of children and families (Robertson, 2014). Whether IY does provide sufficient, sustainable, and meaningful support for children and families as trial reports suggest still remains to be seen.

## Governmentality and Discursive Normalisation

As the author of this article discussed elsewhere (Bae, 2015, 2016), many of Foucault's studies explore the inextricably interlocked relations between power and knowledge, and how they sustain each other (Foucault, 1977, 1980, 1988a, 2003). His analysis of a penal system and a mental institution reveals the way that psychology has been privileged over other types of knowledge, and in return it has operated as an apparatus of power (Foucault, 2003). In *Bio-politics*, it is the relation between the neoliberal truth and the mechanism of power that captures his interest: the singularity of neoliberal ideas within modern society, and "how far and to what extent the formal principles of a market economy can index a general art of government" (Foucault, 2004, p. 131).

Foucault defined the term governmentality as "the conduct of conduct," "a form of activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons" (Foucault et al., 1991, p. 2). In his notion of *government*, governmentality concerns not only relations within social institutions and the exercise of political sovereignty, but also private interpersonal relations that involve control or guidance of self and others. Governmentality, then, includes the way that social institutions aim to direct the behaviour and thinking of people in society, as well as the ways in which individuals govern themselves (Baez & Talburt, 2008). Through this process of governance, a particular form of reality becomes conceivable, and a specific norm of being is considered more desirable in that social context.

The Pacini-Ketchabaw and De Almeida (2006) study provided a clear example of how Foucault's idea can be applied. The researchers in this Canadian study explore the way in which the discourses of the dominant language influence immigrant parents' and early childhood educators' perception of bilingualism. These discourses from the dominant language group privilege one language over others, and a particular language is imposed as the only worthwhile knowledge to learn and to speak. By unpacking discourses on language learning in the Canadian early childhood context, Pacini-Ketchabaw and De Almeida draw attention to the way in which power and knowledge directly imply each other. The results of this study illustrates that the hierarchical standing of English as the dominant language perpetuates unequal power relations in the context.

Using Foucault's ideas of the power-knowledge relation and governmentality, Bloch and Popkewitz (1995) analysed discourses of child development in American early childhood settings. Their study showed that the understanding of child development as a biological and universal process is deeply entrenched in a system of reasoning (Foucault's governmentality), constructing the way in which educators perceive children and conduct their teaching. The researchers pointed out that this Cartesian-Newtonian knowledge of childhood operates as a part of broad power relations by shaping the truth about children and early childhood education. This embedded notion of development, then, "orders how difference was to be understood, classified the normal and that outside of normalcy, what care for children came to mean" (p. 10). They cautioned that this scientific knowledge of children's development is assumed and naturalised, rather than challenging it and problematizing where appropriate. As the discourses on universal and

biological developmental stages become entangled with the practice of power in early childhood, the power to judge *normal/abnormal* childhood is extended and its excessive singularity obscured.

Applying Foucault's notions as a key tool of the analysis, this article examines subsequent questions: What are the neoliberal assumptions embedded in IY, and how do they support the system of power? How does the neoliberal ideology of IY recodify the soul of individuals in early years and govern their bodies in the milieu?

## The Metanarrative of Neoliberalism in Modern Parenting

The principle of neoliberal ideology shares the same premise as the colonising power, presupposing that all human beings are the same. According to this perspective, the ultimate goal in life is to produce, consume and grow in an economic sense (Kaščák & Pupala, 2011; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Roberts, 2004, 2007; Roberts & Peters, 2008). The premise relies on the assumption that a responsible and capable citizen of society will naturally seek his/her self-interest of growth and production, and consequently each individual's monetary actions will encourage economic development for all. Regardless of one's beliefs and values, all *normal* individuals must pursue what is considered to be a productive and economic outcome by Anglo-European and Anglo-American epistemology (Moss, 2014; Perez & Cannella, 2010; Smith, 1999).

This neoliberal rhetoric places economic growth at the centre of truth, framing desirable subjects as "enterprising and competitive entrepreneurs" in the market economy (Olssen, as cited in Perez & Cannella, 2010, p. 146). Because the role of the state is to ensure an economically advantageous environment for all, those who do not demonstrate the specific norm of productivity are considered to be a risk or a burden on society, and thus punishable (Foucault, 1977, 2004). Applying statistical techniques, this populational reasoning normalises the binary categorisation of normal/abnormal (Bloch & Popkewitz, 1995). Through this view of the world, the *unmotivated* must be punished and made to conform by state intervention (Perez & Cannella, 2010). *The Others* with different socio-economic, cultural, and gender backgrounds are "constructed as the abnormal and in need of monetary and/or social, psychological, or educational intervention, assistance, or redemption" (Bloch & Popkewitz, 1995, p. 15).

The effects of neoliberal principles are not restricted to those evident in market relations, but go beyond monetary exchanges. The persistent advance of neoliberalism around the world ensures that the market economy has become "the organising principle for all political, social and economic conditions," in other words, a governing manual to the subject's conduct (Moss, 2014, p. 64). Parallel to the process by which psychology has extended its reach into other sectors with the support of disciplinary power, Foucault's (2004) analysis illustrates the pervading dominance of neoliberal ideology even in non-economic domains. He argues that the problems of neoliberalism arise from this "inversion of the relationships of the social to the economic," the paradox of justifying the intervention of the state in non-economic fields using economic assumptions (Foucault, 2004, p. 240). In particular, Foucault critiques the way that American neoliberals apply market economy to understand non-market relationships such as education, marriage and mother-child relationships despite there being little relevancy between them. Due to their entanglement with the overall exercise of power, the principles of market economy are projected in the art of government, generalising the form of *enterprise* in the social bodies (Foucault, 2004). Everything in both economic and non-economic spheres is measured or calculated in the economic cost-profit/investment-return

grid. This mechanism of power analyses social fabrics to arrange and reduce individuals, so that the subjects and their lives can be managed as a permanent enterprise within a network of multiple enterprises. Their private property, social relationships (e.g., marriage, and reproductive functions), and their *worthwhile* aptitudes are compared with the norm, ranking each individual by economic value. All subjects are individualised as economic units, and distributed for the effective exercise of the totalising power of neoliberalism.

Many of these neoliberal discourses are present in IY, naturalising the economic calculation of parents' and children's performances. The analysis of the project illustrates that IY (re)produces and reinforces a particular or rigid norm of parenting while other values and beliefs in childrearing practice are ignored.

The ideology of neoliberalism has become a much contested field of enquiry, not only for its extensive authority in modern society, but also because of the often oversimplified use of the term (Foucault, 2004; Kaščák & Pupala, 2011; Lather, 2012; Perez & Cannella, 2010). Contrary to the commonly generalised application of the phrase as a simple monolithic type of market relations in society, neoliberalism in the present day denotes more than a revival of traditional economic theories (Foucault, 2004; Kaščák & Pupala, 2011; Moss, 2014; Nxumalo, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Rowan, 2011; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Perez & Cannella, 2010; Roberts, 2007). Neoliberal ideology has taken various forms of manifestation, been combined with other theories and adapted into different contexts (Roberts, 2007). For this reason, Foucault (2004) argued that it is helpful to approach neoliberalism as a trajectory of market principles influencing the art of government, rather than limiting our understanding of neoliberalism to it being merely a study of market economy.

The author acknowledges that neoliberalism is an extensive domain of study that deserves substantial consideration in itself as it takes multiple forms in different contexts. However, due to practical constraints, this article applies the term neoliberalism, rather than the plural form *neoliberalisms*, and the particular scope of this study focuses on: ways in which neoliberal discourses dominate modern parenting pedagogy, and how they govern the soul and body of children and parents in early years.

## Knowledge as a Commodity

Since 1984, neoliberal ideology has been a relentless force of governance throughout various sectors in New Zealand (Roberts, 2007). To adapt to the unique environment of New Zealand, different elements of theories such as Human Capital Theory, monetarism, Public Choice Theory, Agency Theory and Transaction Cost Economics were combined with market principles (Olssen, as cited in Roberts, 2007). The following statements provided by a Tertiary Education Advisory Commission clearly illustrated the firm grip of neoliberalism on the New Zealand policy direction (as cited in Roberts & Peters, 2008, p. 44):

> Education provided by tertiary education providers, businesses, and community groups is vitally important to New Zealand in building a true knowledge society and achieving the economic benefits for such a society. The quality of our knowledge and skills base will determine New Zealand's future success in the global economy and as a cohesive society.

The report emphasized the importance of building the knowledge society and strengthening the educational system for a more confident and prosperous New Zealand (Roberts & Peters, 2008). Under the notion of *user pays*, many policies in education have undergone the reform process that has reconstructed

knowledge "as a commodity: something to be sold, traded and consumed," promising a higher status for New Zealand in the world economy (Roberts, 2007, p. 351).

Educational institutions (e.g., early childhood settings, schools, universities and other forms of tertiary organisations) have turned into purchasable services that users and consumers can pick and choose for the highest return. In exchange for their investment, students (the users and consumers of educational commodities) expect and demand these services to equip them with skills and knowledge that will provide advantage over others in a competitive employment market. The dominant discourse of knowledge in the last two decades' educational policies were merged with information and skills (as cited in Roberts & Peters, 2008), restructuring education as a training ground that armed individuals with *expert* knowledge and aptitudes for employment.

It is this policy climate that brought about the implementation of IY in New Zealand. In spite of the innovative production and implementation of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the early childhood curriculum document with a socio-cultural framework, the progress of neoliberalism has not ceased in early childhood sectors. The introduction and implementation of IY is a good illustration of the growing effect of neoliberal ideology in early childhood education. Although Atawhaingia te Pā Harakeke (Ministry of Education, 2001), a whānau training and support programme based on Kaupapa Māori philosophy and the bicultural context of New Zealand, had already been developed and implemented by the Ministry of Education since 2001, the New Zealand Government decided to scrap the programme, and introduce IY in its place.

The significant issues concerning the implementation of IY derive from its incongruent contexts (i.e., American and clinical background) as well as the way in which it embodies the neoliberal notion of knowledge as a commodity. The programme is registered under a Trademark, and marketed in the fashion of a consumable service that prevents and reduces potential risks in individuals' lives and in society as a whole. All programme materials are owned and strictly controlled by The Incredible Years, Inc., USA, limiting any modification of the content (The Incredible Years®, 2013b, para. 4). According to the official website, prices for each resource (e.g., DVDs, fridge magnets, handbooks, posters, T-shirts and stickers) range from US$ 800 to $ 2,000 per programme, and can only be purchased through the owner of the service, The Incredible Years, Inc. (The Incredible Years®, 2013b). The implementation of IY in New Zealand came at the substantial cost of NZ$ 7.6 million (Robertson, 2014). However, this considerable figure is rationalised with language and terms such as *cost-effective, evidence-based, school readiness, quality* and *universal outcomes* (Sturrock et al., 2014).

Under the cover of these ambiguous terms, neoliberal assumptions have flourished and progressed throughout other New Zealand education sectors and policy decisions. For example, National Standards, the standardised assessment for primary and secondary children, was introduced in 2010 by the Ministry of Education. This policy change in higher education has meant increased tension and pressure for children, parents and educators in early years, as they must regulate their own and/or others' performance to satisfy the homogenous learning outcomes. The ripple effect from this policy change in higher education has accelerated the progress of neoliberal discourse in the domain of early education, authorising the scientific and colonising values and assumptions within IY. Even though there is an evident conflict between the early childhood curriculum and IY, parents and early childhood educators are expected to

foster and train children's "school readiness," and prevent "predictable negative consequences" such as violence, delinquency, and substance abuse by these children in adolescence and adulthood (Borden et al., 2010, p. 223). Children of parents living in poverty, and with conduct problems, are associated with language such as "high risk," "target population," "aggression" and "treatment," while promoting and justifying the IY's psychological and scientific techniques in nurturing school readiness, academic skills for success later in life (The Incredible Years®, 2010, p. 1).

This discursive shift in policy direction has overturned the values and beliefs that *Te Whāriki* placed on co-constructing knowledge with children and parents, replacing them by (re)producing and circulating the commercialised and commoditised norm of knowledge as the regime of truth. According to this understanding of learning, *the truth*, the only worthwhile knowledge, is waiting out there to be found, to be transferred from the experts to novices, to be mastered and to be purchased. The following statements in *Te Whāriki* and IY highlight a stark contrast between the norm of knowledge that is valued by each policy document:

> **Te Whāriki, Principle: Family and Community – Whānau Tangata**
> The wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum. Children's learning and development are fostered if the well-being of their family and community is supported; if their family, culture, knowledge and community are respected; and if there is a strong connection and consistency among all the aspects of the children's world. The curriculum builds on what children bring to it and makes links with the everyday activities and special events of families, whānau, local communities, and cultures. Different cultures have different child-rearing patterns, beliefs, and traditions and may place value on the different knowledge, skills, and attitudes. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 42)

> The Incredible Years® **evidence based parenting programs** focus on strengthening parenting competencies and fostering parent involvement in children's school experiences, to **promote children's academic, social and emotional skills and reduce conduct problems.**
> (The Incredible Years®, 2013a, para. 1)

> **Incredible Years, Content and objectives of the Attentive Parenting programs**
> Program One: Attentive child-directed play promotes positive relationships and children's confidence.
> •Responding to children's developmental readiness
>
> Program Two: Attentive academic and persistence coaching promote children's language skills and school readiness.
>
> Program Three: Attentive emotion coaching strengthens children's emotional literacy.
> (The Incredible Years®, 2013c, para. 2)

*Te Whāriki* acknowledges various values and beliefs of children and parents, and encourages collaborative and fluid processes of knowledge production. On the contrary, the norm of knowledge in IY is somewhat rigid: only academic, evidence-based, scientific, and developmentally appropriate knowledge is acceptable. Knowledge production is described as a one-way transfer process of knowledge from experts (e.g., teachers, IY team leaders, adults) to novices (e.g., children, parents) that will prepare children for higher education and consequently a better chance in life. This difference in knowledge discourses in *Te Whāriki* and IY indicates that early childhood

education in New Zealand has regressed from its innovative approach to learning back to an outcome-based notion of learning (Farquhar, Gibbons, & Tesar, 2015). It represents how fast and how far the colonising and neoliberal regime of truth has become a governing rationality for the subjects in New Zealand early childhood sectors.

This neoliberal discourse of knowledge is highly problematic because it appropriates and exacerbates the current hierarchies within the system of power. In the modern neoliberal society, where everything is economically calculable, the values of various knowledge systems may be converted into a cost-benefit/invest-return grid (Farquhar et al., 2015). For example, all IY team leaders must purchase training programmes run by The Incredible Years, Inc. and be certified by IY. The developers of the programme argue that the "initial investments will eventually pay off in terms of strong family outcomes and a sustainable intervention programme" (Webster-Stratton, 2014, p. 8). This regime of truth provides "a condition of the formation and development of capitalism" (Foucault, 1980, p. 133). Those who possess the commodity have control over the knowledge economy, ultimately securing their dominant position in the system as well as fortifying the existing mechanism of power.

In this way of making sense of the world, knowledge is simply another currency with which to differentiate and dispose of subjects, and it forms part of the disciplinary mechanism used to justify the imbalance and the inequality in society (Foucault, 1977, 1980, 1991). Only profitable knowledge in the monetary grid becomes visible, ensuring that the holder of this knowledge has an advantage over others. For example, by placing *school readiness* in a central position among key competencies and learning outcomes for children, the discourses in IY implicitly depreciate early childhood education to a mere training ground for the *more important* learning that will take place during higher education. Because the only knowledge recognised as worthwhile for children in all contexts is an academic form of knowing, other forms of learning experiences in early childhood settings are either dismissed, or need to be recodified closer to the norm of knowledge (e.g., literacy, science, and mathematics). The common and persisting perception of the early childhood educator as a *glorified nanny* or *kind, child-loving lady* illustrates this point clearly. Both implicitly and explicitly, early childhood educators are often compelled to defend their position as educators (Osgood, 2012). To prove professional knowledge and competency as educators and teachers, early childhood educators are pressured to demonstrate expertise (i.e., school-relevant skills) in their pedagogy and assessment processes, interpreting or recoding children's learning experiences in relation to the set of skills and knowledge that is valued in higher educational settings.

Another problem with this approach to knowledge and knowledge production is that it masks and validates the singularity of the neoliberal notion of knowledge and the imbalanced power dynamics in the system. As Foucault observes, the main objective of the modern governing rationality is a seamless exercise of power, "a universal assignation of subjects to an economically useful life" (Foucault et al., 1991, p. 12). Throughout recent educational and social policies, including IY, the shared goal of the population is presumed to be economic prosperity with state intervention as a vital apparatus to achieve this (Roberts, 2007). These discourses conceal the fact that knowledge construction is fundamentally discriminatory and political, and the way in which it operates as a part of the mechanism of power "to assure the security of those natural phenomena, economic processes and the intrinsic processes of population" (Foucault et al., 1991, p. 19). Whether one possesses a particular type of

knowledge determines the position of that person in societal hierarchies, while justifying or endorsing the privileged status of those with the knowledge. The challenges that individuals face are framed as the end product of their own incompetency, rather than the issues of inequality in societal structures. Therefore, it is parents and children who need to invest their own resources to overcome these difficulties.

A useful example of this is the manner in which Māori children are represented in the Ministry of Education's evaluation report in IY (Sturrock & Gray, 2013). This pilot study pointed out the higher rates of conduct problems in Māori children, identifying them as a target group for intervention programmes to reduce "substantial costs in the education, health, justice and welfare sectors" (Sturrock & Gray, 2013, p. 7). Instead of questioning whether or not the current societal structure provides effective support for children and parents with different backgrounds, these discourses divert our attention from the power dynamic to the non-conforming and abnormal aspects of individuals, correlating these with risks and dangers. The discourses in IY associate conduct problems, drug problems, and delinquency later in life with parental deficits such as parental depression, insufficient parental knowledge, and low socio-economic status, claiming that the completion of the course can eliminate these predictable negative outcomes (The Incredible Years®, 2013a, 2013d, 2013f).

## Child and Parents as a Commodity

Foucault (1977, 1980, 2003, 2014) approached the modern governmental rationality as a study of what it means to be governed or governable in a particular society. His studies addressed the way in which subjects are constructed by the mechanism of power either as the normal/economically-useful or the abnormal/burden of society, and what is or can be regulated and controlled by the techniques of power (Foucault et al., 1991). Once more, Foucault is fascinated with the effect of a particular norm of knowledge becoming a regime of truth, and how this dominant norm of knowledge pervades different areas. In *Bio-politics* (Foucault, 2004), he explored by what means the notion of *Homo œconomicus*, economic man, is naturalised as the governable subject in modern neoliberal milieu. Foucault's analysis of this governable subject in modern disciplinary society demonstrates that the economic model of the normal and useful body has saturated both economic and social domains alike. Through the media (in Foucault's terms, public opinion), polices and institutions, the discourses of *Homo œconomicus* present a desirable citizen of society, and rationalise the state intervention that subjugates and reforms the body of the population (Foucault, 2004).

Foucault (2004) explains this norm of desirable/economic subject, *Homo œconomicus* in his lecture (p. 270):

> *Homo œconomicus* is someone who pursues his own interest, and whose interest is such that it converges spontaneously with the interest with others…With regard to *Homo œconomicus*, one must *laisser-faire*; he is the subject or object of *laissez-fair*…that is to say, the person who accepts reality or who responds systematically to modifications in the variables in the environment, appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment.

These governable, self-interested individuals respond to environmental variables in systematic, scientific and rational ways, and in so doing achieve "an optimal allocation of scarce resources to alternative ends" (Foucault, 2004, p. 268). The definition of the term constructs the economic analysis equivalent to any strategic and purposeful conducts that accomplish

optimal effect with a determinate end. Following this logic, *all* rational conduct can be an object of economic analysis. Hence, not only the body of the subject in the market domain, but also non-market forms of conduct, as well as the past, present and future of one's life, are placed under the scope of the modern disciplinary power (Foucault, 2004).

This school of thought utilises the science of the modern human capital theory to calculate and classify every aspect of human life as a measurable commodity. Based on the assumption that all human beings seek the self-interest of economic prosperity, the modern human theory constructs the subject as capital itself, and education and training as a crucial component to ensure advantage in a competitive global market (Fitzsimons, 2015; Kaščák & Pupala, 2011). Once each individual is evaluated in relation to cost-benefit market values in this neoliberal schema, she/he is categorised and positioned as either of two opposite values: economically active subject as a useful body on one end, and those who are not on the other end. Because this way of thinking constructs the body, the life and the history of subject as calculable resources or commodities for economic progress, people with mental and physical disabilities are likely to be considered a liability to society, and labelled as broken or damaged goods. Disparities between these groups of individuals and the norm are magnified and described in deficit terms, and moral values are attached to these characteristics and natures. Even the efficiency of government intervention on the marginalised groups is measured in terms of market economy rather than social justice (Fitzsimons, 2015).

The desirable, right and proper way of being parents (re)produced by the discourses in IY resonates with this model of the economic individual. The before and during the programme surveys collect the information about the parents' and children's history of mental illness, criminality, economic and marital status, and education levels, which, in turn, is applied to identify their economic worth and the degree of intervention required for their reform. When the assumptions of neoliberalism and modern human capital theories are believed to be true, normal and responsible individuals are expected to continue self-improvement and persist with their journey as life-long learners (Roberts & Peters, 2008). Whether it is at the individual or institutional level, these discourses position *the knower* with privileged and unchallengeable status, normalising the dichotomous and binary worldview (Foucault, 1980, 1991, 2004). Because the subjects in the power mechanisms are identified and recognised for who they are in terms of their status in hierarchies and what is expected of them (e.g., experts/novice, parents/teachers, adults/children dichotomies and binaries), it becomes increasingly challenging for subjects to question and to resist what is presented as the truth by the system. The result is that it double-binds parents who are referred to participate in IY from opting out from this supposedly non-compulsory programme for so-called high-risk children and families. The individuals' choice to attend IY or not is only illusionary, since the deficit labels that are associated with them, as well as the offers and the opportunities for corrective training to overcome these shortcomings impart a subtle yet powerful pressure to take part in the programme and to conform.

This is exemplified in the experiences of children and families with non-dominant cultures in educational sectors. Being subjected to multiple layers of subjugation and oppression techniques by the modern disciplinary power, the complexity of immigrant parents' and children's lives is reduced and categorised according to a one dimensional and linear economic schema, and they are labelled as *incomplete, yet-to-be developed/underdeveloped,* and *abnormal* beings. Their economic, cultural and political

status as *the Others* (strangers in a foreign land) and as passive receivers of knowledge, diminishes the validity of their own heterogeneous worldviews and further complicates their ability to challenge and resist the *indisputable truth* given by the dominant power. Therefore, having been identified as a novice, a stranger in a foreign land, and a *yet-to-be master* of the knowledge; challenging what is presented as important skills and knowledge by the experts or the knowers (e.g., teachers, IY team leaders, and educational institutions) becomes unthinkable for some children and parents from different cultural heritages.

The insistence that education is bound to economics produces a new way of thinking in early childhood. Because each subject is a unit of human capital in a knowledge society, a child is constructed to be a future entrepreneur and consumer (Vandenbroeck, 2006). The role of teachers and parents is, therefore, to assist, nurture and train the child to be a governable subject, a responsible and productive citizen. This discursive construction of early childhood (re)generates a simplified version of education and parenting pedagogy: producing skilled technicians, or rather, automatons, who perform economic efficiencies with minimum costs/investments (Lather, 2012; Mitchell, 2005; Moss, 2014; Nxumalo et al., 2011; Osgood, 2012; Perez & Cannella, 2010). As many pre-eminent scholars (Farquhar & White, 2014; Olssen, 2004; Osgood, 2012; Roberts, 2005, 2009b, 2014; Roberts & Codd, 2010) have noted in their studies of tertiary education, teacher training and policy production in the modern neoliberal society, one's critical, inquisitive and reflective abilities are not required and even undesirable in this approach to education as these skills are considered as excess in terms of the cost-benefit grid.

## Calculable/Measurable Relationships

Using the metaphor of governing a ship, Foucault described how government in modern society is more than ruling over territory (Foucault et al., 1991). Managing a ship involves not only being in charge of sailors, but also establishing relations between people and things (e.g., cargo, the beat of sailors' labour, storms, rocks, winds). It is rather, "men in their relation to that other kinds of things, customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking" (p. 93). One's resources, aptitudes, fertilities, illness and death are the object to be dominated and utilised for maximum economic performance in the system of disciplinary power.

Foucault (2004) refered to this type of power as biopower, and provided a further example of this in American neoliberal analysis using the child-mother relationship. The quality of time that the mother spends with the child (i.e., psychological benefits), and the care she provides for the physical development of the child (e.g., providing food, a specific way of arranging and imposing eating patterns) are understood and examined in terms of investment. One of the key resources of IY, the Piggy Bank Poster (The Incredible Years®, 2013f) depicts a palpable embodiment of this notion. The poster urges parents to "remember to build up your bank account" with a certain type of interacting such as *talking, encouraging, attentive, praise, play, and touch*. This approach to understanding and distinguishing different kinds of relationships and to examining time as invested capital is supported throughout the programme, (re)constructing a distinctive norm of how *quality time* with your children should look. IY also provides evident instructions that misbehaviour must be identified and dealt with through behaviour management techniques, for example, actively ignoring the misbehaving child (The Incredible Years®, 2013d, 2013e). Does this mean that parents who do not engage their children in lots of verbal interactions, child-

directed play, and physical contacts are falling short of investing their time capital into their children's development, and consequently impoverishing them?

What is also often overlooked is that understanding parents' and children's lives through the unrestricted and exceedingly generalised market principle provides inadequate perspectives because it disregards the complex dynamic between individuals and contexts. This is evident in the case of modern parenting. Families have become smaller (there is now a higher percentage of nuclear families in the population) and the support that these families have access to is reduced, as more people live in separate households, and church culture and other community support has declined. Therefore, the pressure and stress of childrearing have increased when compared with the past, when town or village culture provided a kind of support system around church and kin. Globalisation has intensified the pervasive dominance of capitalism in an effective manner across the globe in recent decades putting active economic engagement of the subject on a pedestal. This imposes further pressure on parents to have two incomes, as well as performing the norm of the positive parenting pedagogy. While modern parents are provided with less support, they are expected to deliver more, thus generating optimal productivity for society with the least investment.

Baez and Talburt (2008) claimed that this is how the government's family policy operates as a "site of intense regulation" in the modern world (p. 25). Drawing from Foucault's notion of governmentality which seeks to form, direct, or affect the conduct of the individual, Baez and Talburt (2008) analysed two pamphlets that were published by the U.S. Department of Education. The authors argued that this mode of parenting problematises the conduct of children and families, and seeks to channel their conduct to meet particular purposes. Without considering the diverse and complex needs and backgrounds of children and families, these policies convert parenting into "a surrogate to schooling" (Popkewitz, as cited in Baez & Talburt, 2008, p. 34), placing home as a centre of the responsibility to train children to be moral and dependable citizens. In this norm of parenting, *good/desirable* parenting is described as something universal and achievable that is directed at the *common good*, and if not met, *ineptitude* in parenting can be fixed through experts' support and parenting courses run by institutions. The authors contended that this entry of school's and society's goals into homes has far-reaching consequences as it normalises a certain notion of parenthood, and silences and excludes other forms of child-parent relationships. The findings from Macartney's (2011) study in New Zealand resonates with this. By exploring the *real* experience of her own family and another family with a disabled child, the author illustratedhow this rigid and normalised concept of parenting systematically excluded parents and children with differences.

## Conclusion

This article has explored how the modern disciplinary power has increased its effective control over the subject's bodies by governing or transforming the individual's conduct in parenting. A very particular and rigid model of parenting is identified within policy changes: self-managing, economically sound, and functional individuals who are in control of their children's education and well-being. While the support that is given to families by government is reduced, the responsibilities of individuals are increased significantly. By constructing and reinforcing the definitive norm of 'good/desirable' parenting, the disciplinary power recodifies the subject's sense of self and who he/she wants to be (Duncan & Bartle, 2014).

The analysis of this study shows that the dominant discourses of parenting in early

childhood policies such as IY construct an economic/neoliberal norm of parenting as the absolute truth, limiting the understanding of early childhood and regulating parenting practices in New Zealand. The copious research in the field of early childhood studies and parenting pedagogy which demonstrate concern for the current construction of childrearing practices was investigated throughout this article. These researchers, working across a variety of sectors and contexts, point out that normalising a specific modality of childrearing practice as the only worthwhile knowledge reinscribes inequality and exacerbates social injustice in the milieu (Bloch & Popkewitz, 1995; Burman, 2008; Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Swadener, 2006; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Duncan & Bartle, 2014; Farquhar et al., 2015; Kincheloe, 1995; MacNaughton, 2005; Moss, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007; Smeyers, 2008; Suissa, 2006; Swadener, 1995). This signals the need for different approaches to parenting, which consider complexity and nuance of reality that children and parents experience in daily lives.

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