All articles in the Kenarchy Journal are double peer-reviewed, but so far, we have not published any reviewer's response. In this case, it was important to ground the article in the lived experience of those working professionally with children. Keith White is one such, but given the extent that the article draws on his work, we asked Peter McKinney whether we could publish his review, which follows.

Do you think that this article is suitable for publication in an academic journal?

Answer: YES

Rationale/Comments:

Overview

The paper sets out successfully a theology of the child that speaks to "our understanding of the nature of divinity and the future of humanity" (p1), drawing on diverse academic research, lived experience and child development theory. The paper draws very usefully on the framing child development theory outlined by Keith J. White brought into relief by the Mitchell's own work on the subsumption of transcendence by sovereignty. The presentation and critique of White's work helps link the paper to practice in the field of child development and education, and its wider impact, as well as reflecting back on the "nature of divinity".

Further Comments/Responses

Child-Centredness

Within child development practice and research, child-centredness is taken as both foundational to understanding 'what works', where the child is an active participant and leader in their own learning, and as subversive to what is too often a narrow, top down education system and cultural (and socio-economic) straight jacket for ideas of who children are and can be.

This paper robustly places children at the centre of a theology of the child, and goes further by aligning the incarnation – of Jesus as a child – with such a view. The conflagration of the advent of incarnation with the being and experience of a child offers a rich window into what kenarchy can look like both in the specific of how to relate to children in our society and the universal outworking of a politics of love. This is a revolutionary concept when taken seriously, and Mitchell's questions and exploration of what the 'child in the midst' means hold potential for further research and praxis.

Beware the Adult in the Room

I wholeheartedly agree "that the realisation that the place of the greatest vulnerability is the location of the divine presence cascades a re-ordering of our personal and social priorities." Mitchell makes and reinforces this point well. There is a tension however in the use of the language of marginalisation – refugee, victim – and the language of weakness and vulnerability. Whilst this is acknowledged and partly mitigated in the paper by Mitchell's redefinition of 'weakness' to "a different kind of power" or "God's true strength" (p4), the very need for redefinition of power (and thus powerlessness) illustrates a tension that is pervasive in child development practice, research and in cultural assumptions about the child – that of a foundational 'deficit view' of the child and of childhood.

In my experience, whilst individuals and society (and here I reference specifically the UK and Irish contexts of children's health, education and care services) all agree, indeed hold as sacred, that children's well-being should be a priority and central to all decision-making, this core intention is all too often undermined by a 'deficit' view of the child. This core belief locks children into a box as '*always* vulnerable' and thus needing 'protected'. Moving beyond the positive and natural protection of nurturing, this approach forms a total view of the child as weak, powerless and viewed as 'not yet adult' – essentially in a state of permanent deficit. Even in actions to safeguard and protect, the core power relations at work – adult to child – remain, perpetuating marginalisation. This is made manifest in the importance (or lack thereof) placed on the voice and potential of the child to shape their care and learning – especially at very young ages – and in attitudes to risk that often undermine transformed adult-child relations and the very potential of explorative, creative imaginative play.

Research and practice in early years health and education – especially in socio-emotional and brain development - is showing ever more clearly the developmental explosion that occurs in this early stage of life and how this tracks in integrated development. Here we see both an opportunity for impact, pointed to by Mitchell, by rightly preventing and mitigating childhood adversity as work on Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma-Informed Practice is doing. However, a question remains as to what wider provocation this call from Mitchell holds?

With a 'deficit view', the idea of what it means to be adult, or to be fully human, takes on a 'not childlike' imperative, running counter to the imperative that Mitchell highlights – for the child to 'lead' a "new humanity" (p10). This is a widely felt and deeply transformative call for immediate action and for deep structural change for education and children's services, not least for for the view of the self, family and community values. Absolutely fundamental to truly hearing this, and then acting on it, is what Mitchell calls "full-on identity with the child". By recognising the depth of

potential that *identity with* the child holds, mirrored by the advent of incarnation in just such a way, this is nothing short of a revolutionary re-conception of how we live. Loris Malaguzzi, one of the early leaders of the Reggio movement in early childhood education points to the depth of this, reflecting on the 'image of the child.'

> "In such a moment as the present… science, history and the public conscience appear unanimous in recognizing the child as endowed with the virtues, resources and intrinsic rights we mentioned earlier. But a child so endowed paradoxically explodes in the hands of his creators: such a child becomes too overwhelming for philosophy, science, education and political economy."[1]

I suggest the theology of the child 'in the midst' that Mitchell points to, is indeed a paradoxical explosion waiting to happen of the order spoken of, and longed for, above.

Growth of Love: Security, Boundaries, Significance, Community, Creativity

The paper highlights the importance of attachment and a holistic approach to security for children. Approaches to keeping children 'safe' have focussed on quantifiable risks giving weight to physical security and safety. The pointing towards holistic wellbeing and the necessary complication of narrow child protection approaches – exemplified in the tension of inappropriate touch alongside the basic human child need to be held – need to be further expanded to ensure that whole child well-being is prioritised, that is, not lost in pursuit of narrow safeguarding. This point is well made. The relatively recent moves to include exploitation within safeguarding frameworks show a deeper appreciation for the context in a which a twenty-first century child is growing up, and give credence to White's concern related to electronic communication and the role of technological developments. This is a priority area, and one in which the pace of research, action, and resulting speed of change have too large a gap.

In responding to the presentation and critique of White's model on child development, I find it most helpful in that it points to a holistic, whole community-involved model of education and care for children (with parallels to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model of Child Development) and that this does indeed lead to the call to a "fundamental overhaul of what we mean by education", the embracing of the 'paradoxical explosion' of placing the child 'in the midst'. My experience in the field leads me to this exact same call.

[1]Carolyn Edwards, Lella Gandini, George Forman, eds. *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in Transformation* (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers Inc. 2011), 53.

In responding to both the implicit and explicit calls within the paper, I see parallels with the holistic and now world-renowned Reggio Emilia approach to child development and community organising already referenced above. This approach, implemented now over decades in Northern Italy, prioritises the 'encounter' and 'dialogue' with a material, an idea, another person or indeed a 'crisis' (through varied, multi-level and open-ended opportunities for creative play) as the point of development and discovery, ensuring opportunity for children to experience these encounters and not to be protected or isolated from them. The priority, and time and space, given to the 'encounter' and 'process' in this approach gives space for children to dialogue with the "nature of the Self"(p14) in the encounter with the 'Other' – a key point highlighted by Mitchell and one which opens up a wide and multi-level conversation on child and human development. The lived experience, whole municipality and intentional approach in the child-centred community in Reggio is a helpful reference for what the paper is pointing towards, for both an overhauled meaning of education, and how a local community can place the child at the centre, in the awareness that this remakes the world.

Children in the life of the spirit

The paper concludes with an exploration, with personal testimony of lived experience, of the moves of the Spirit in the 20th Century and the role of children in them. In doing so, Mitchell offers us a hope of a "radical messianic moment" in this flow, for new "becoming"(p22), that is if we are to receive it from "our child brothers and sisters" (p22). We are left with the provocative challenge that opens the paper and indeed runs through it – will we receive the child 'in the midst' and open ourselves to the transformative encounter that will ensue?

The following poem by the founder of the Reggio Approach – Loris Malaguzzi – I think beautifully weaves in many of the themes in this paper.

NO WAY. THE HUNDRED IS THERE

The child

is made of one hundred.

The child has

a hundred languages

a hundred hands

a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.
The child has
a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
but they steal ninety-nine.

The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and Christmas.
They tell the child:

to discover the world already there

and of the hundred

they steal ninety-nine.

They tell the child:

that work and play

reality and fantasy

science and imagination

sky and earth

reason and dream

are things

that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child

that the hundred is not there.

The child says:

No way. The hundred is there.

Loris Malaguzzi (translated by Lella Gandini)

Founder of the Reggio Emilia Centre, Reggio, Northern Italy