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Constructing and maintaining data doppelgangers: rethinking early years assessment in England.

Children are reconstituted as data doppelgangers.

In England, the curriculum for children aged 0-5 claims to put the child at the centre of pedagogy. It claims to be a child centred curriculum which values the 'unique child' and seeks to support the child to develop and learn (Department for Education, 2014). Alongside this child-centred curriculum however, there exists a system of assessment and classification based on surveillance. At the age of 5, each child is reconstituted in numerical form for the purposes of classification and accountability. The percentage of children who reach a 'good level of development' or the expected level in 5 areas of the curriculum, is used as a key performance indicator. This creates what Williamson (2014) refers to as data doppelgangers.

How doppelgangers are created

These shadowy figures are constructed through the process of converting qualitative, observational data into numerical form for the purposes of national statistical analysis. The demands of accountability have created a system where this data has become more important than the actual embodied child. Thus, the aim of the early years foundation stage has become the formulation and maintenance of these data-doppelgangers. The embodied child is sacrificed for the doppelganger as it is the doppelganger which will be used to judge the school.

Vulnerable children are disadvantaged by triage system

This move from child-centred to doppelganger-centred learning creates disadvantage as children are triaged into three groups- those who meet the good level of development, those who might and the no-hopers (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016). Children who are close to achieving the norms are targeted, with those who have little chance of meeting them receiving less attention. This has a particular impact on EAL and SEN children who are unable to demonstrate the expected level in all 5 areas of development and may be denied the support they need in favour of intervention groups to support the borderline cases.

References

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