

Reconceptualizing Movements: Foundations for the Critical Rethinking of Childhood Policy

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For at least 25 years, critical scholars in education and related fields have challenged notions of universalist truths and monocultural interpretations of life, knowledge, and ways of being and supporting each other and the world around us. Further, the boundaries of thought and the truth orientations of disciplines have been deconstructed and reconceptualized. Grand narratives like Western linearity and progress, childhood salvation, economic universalisms, and predetermined cognitive structuralisms have been soundly refuted. In addition to postmodern challenges to predetermined truth, critical perspectives like poststructural, multicultural, and queer theories, and multiple forms of feminism, as well as postcolonial and indigenous critiques, have unveiled power structures within dominant forms of knowledge and interpretations of life, learning, and even public policy. Fields like cultural studies (Hall, 1999; Surber, 1998; Hall, 1981); women's studies, queer theory, and perspectives that acknowledge intersecting power overall (hooks, 2000; Grosz, 1994; Lerner, 1993; Collins, 1990; Sedgwick, 1993; Butler, 1993, 1990; Fuss, 1991; Crimp, 1988); and postcolonial/subaltern studies have revealed the negative, unjust and oppressive effects of constructing particular groups of people as savage, ignorant, and not civilized (Young, 2001; Spivak, 1999, 1988, Said, 1996, 1993, 1978; Bhabha, 1990). These particular groups may be people of color, women, or even those who are identified as "younger."

In the field of education specifically, foundation scholars and curriculum reconceptualists have stressed the importance of multi-vocal and multi-conceptual narratives of learning and educational possibilities, diversity of life histories and knowledges, as well as the role of power and politics in decision making and educational practice (Spring, 2004; Sleeter, 1996; Apple, 1993; Giroux, 1993; Giroux & McLaren, 1989). A range of scholars and educators now construct and understand education and related public policy as socially, politically, and culturally embedded, as hybrid, and as always implicated in issues of equity and unequal distributions of power and privilege (Cannella, 2005; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). Critical reconceptualizations of education and public policy now have an extended

history and literature (Barone, 2003; Ayers, 2000; McLaren, 2000; Fendler, 1998; Freire, 1998, 1994, 1993; Delpit, 1993)

Such challenges to universalist truths have been taken up by scholars in fields directly tied to early childhood education. The work of the historian Phillip Aries in *Centuries of childhood: A social history of family life* (1962) was an early example that demonstrated the ways in which “childhood” as a concept is socially constructed. Further illustrations include the scholarship of Valerie Walkerdine (1988) and Erica Burman (1994) that directly challenge Piagetian developmental psychology as well as stereotypically masculine ways of interpreting, supporting, and being in the world. Finally, critical early childhood scholars and educators have reconceptualized the field from one of linear, determinist education and public policy that would identify, save, and control those who are younger to ways of functioning and understanding that acknowledge cultural, historical, and political embeddedness, as well as the always, and already, presence of power, privilege, oppression, and disqualification. These scholars include, but are not limited to: Bloch, Holmlund, Moqvist, & Popkewitz, 2003; Boldt, 1997; Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Kincheloe, 2002; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Hauser & Jipson, 1998; Johnson, 2000; Kaomea, 2001; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; MacNaughton, 2000; Popkewitz & Bloch, 2001; Ritchie, 2001; and Silin, 1995, 1987.

These critical early childhood educators, researchers and policy scholars have generated a number of book series as well as research studies, new ways of functioning, journals and critical publications. The purpose of this special issue is to provide for the reader information and examples from the first critical childhood book series, as well as a range of references related to critical childhood public policy. That first series titled, **Rethinking Childhood** is published by Peter Lang and was initiated by Joe Kincheloe and Jan Jipson as series editors in 1997/98. The first three books of the series were *Teaching with Love* by Lisa Goldstein, *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education: Social Justice and Revolution* by Gaile Cannella, and *Intersections: Feminisms/Early childhood*, edited by Mary Hauser and Jan Jipson. Currently, Gaile Cannella serves as the series editor with 46 volumes having been published since the late 1990s.

In this special issue of the *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies* journal, the reader is invited to review chapters from 6 of those volumes:

The Politics of Early Childhood, edited in 2000 by Lourdes Diaz Soto.

- Power & Voice in Research with Children*, edited in 2005 by Beth Blue Swadener and Lourdes Diaz Soto.
- Critical Literacy in Early Childhood Education*, written in 2009 by Elizabeth Quintero.
- Racially Equitable Teaching: Beyond the Whiteness of Professional Development in Early Childhood Education*, written in 2009 by Mary Earick.
- Media Literacy is Elementary: Teaching Youth to Critically Read and Create Media*, written in 2009 by Jeff Share.
- The Subject of Childhood*, written in 2009 by Michael O'Loughlin

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