

Post-foundational and Critical Childhood Studies: New and Emerging Scholarship – Part I

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Authors' Note

Xue Yin and Meredith Whye are both doctoral students, currently completing their dissertations, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. They are also members of the Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education Graduate Circle (see receinternational.org for a description of RECE as an organization and the Graduate Circle). Beginning in the summer of 2024, they began to co-edit this special issue (Part I presented here, and Part II, to be published shortly) that, together, include sixteen articles by new and emerging scholars in early childhood education and critical childhood policy studies.

Each has an individual article in this special issue, and more details about their individual interests and research can be found in those articles. Correspondence or questions can be addressed to xyin32@wisc.edu or whyem@wisc.edu

Abstract

This article provides an overview of the eight articles published in the first part of a two-part special issue focused on new and emerging scholarship centered on post-foundational and critical childhood policy studies in early childhood education. The guest editors describe each of the eight articles in part I of the special issues, and highlight the divergent ways in which they draw on post-foundational theories, and post-qualitative methodologies to address their research questions. The guest editors highlight the conversations that can be had between and among authors as well as readers, the focus on pulling apart or denaturalizing taken for granted norms related to childhood. They ask the reader to engage with the fluidity and entanglement of these new ideas and approaches.

Introduction

We are pleased to announce the first of two special issues of the *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies* Journal, dedicated to post-foundational and critical policy perspectives in childhood studies. This first volume in the two-part Special Issue series represents a step in amplifying the work of new and emerging scholars who engage with innovative theoretical frameworks, generally titled post-foundational theories and post-qualitative methodologies, to challenge and reimagine the field of early childhood education and childhood studies. Here, the two Special Issue co-editors briefly highlight some of the ways the articles illustrate challenges to more traditional theory and explore the ways the writing as well as post-qualitative methodologies allow new ideas to emerge, allowing more entanglements between human/posthuman, material/nonmaterial effects, centering affect as well as effects. The authors provide spaces for new openings, a sense

of childhoods as becoming, fluid, and with, traditionally unrecognized, competencies and ideas.

The special issues (Part I and II) both focus on a group of new scholars' research. This was to highlight very recent research done by those identifying with post-foundational and critical theories and post-qualitative methodologies focusing on early childhood education as well as childhood studies. As co-editors, we wanted to encourage those from global studies to find a place to publish their work, and, to facilitate new conversations and ideas both about the work, and with as well as among the authors.

In the following sections of this introduction to Part I of the two part Special Issue series, we highlight ways in which these authors represent post-foundational and critical theories. We focus on the similarity as well as differences in topics selected, regardless of location. We end with short summaries of each author's individual article, and with an invitation to enjoy connecting with their work. At the end of each article, authors provide a way to correspond with them, should a reader want to know more about their dissertation and/or current research.

Post-Foundation as a Perspective

Post-foundational studies are vital in challenging traditional paradigms and inspiring new conceptualizations, methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and practices in addressing concerns in early childhood education and studies. Despite the importance, the challenges of using post-foundational theories to reconceptualize remain due to the fluidity of the concepts, the emergence of the methods, and the diversity of the cases. This special issue is a conversation collection that connects the voices and thoughts of emerging scholars in early childhood studies. It is a response to the challenges and a collective practice that explores the possibility of reconceptualizing early childhood.

Challenges and Opportunities

First, post-foundational studies in early childhood education are not an essentialized concept. This special issue takes post-foundational studies as an umbrella inquiry to reconceptualize early childhood studies, question established facts about childhood and pedagogy, and act as a "war machine" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) inviting conflicts about and unsettling toward facts. It draws on a variety of theories, including but not limited to "poststructuralism, posthumanism, feminist new materialism, relational ontologies, speculative empiricism, agential realism, immanent ontologies, and affect theory" (Mazzei & Jackson, 2023, p. 14) These theories have a different focus but share the same attempt of disrupting what has been taken for granted, such as denaturalization, decentralization, deconstruction. This special issue, or a particular author, aims not to define what post-foundational studies should be in early childhood education nor to draw a boundary of the field. They introduce different thoughts inspired by "post-theories" to rethink and reimagine concerns and issues in early childhood studies. The articles in this special issue and the following part II offer new entries into current ideas and unfold ideas and practices to divergent and fluid spaces for thought and action.

Second, post-foundational studies do not adopt predetermined methods. The methods emerge through the process of doing research. It depends on the cases, materials, research questions, and argument. In other words, the methods are always on the way to "becoming." In this special issue, authors use different methods, including but not limited to discourse analysis, video-taped anthropologies, narratives with and between children in their entanglements with human/nonhuman others, critical policy studies, and comparative ethnographic case studies. The diversity of the methods is not to demonstrate a methodology labeled as "post-methods"; instead, it provokes creative methods of organizing materials, analyzing and presenting "data."

Third, decentering the European-centric perspective in conceptualizing children is imperative. This special issue is a collection of cases from various contexts, in the past and present, here and there, to collectively disrupt the dominant narrative of children and early childhood studies—cases from Australia on Bush Kinder, Canada on Syrian Refugees, United States on Head Start, Korea and USA on immigrant and bilingual children. We're aware that these cases are mostly in the traditionally geographically considered "Western" contexts. However, the cases are focused on children who are historically marginalized and not fully recognized. By looking at divergent cases that are usually considered "inside," the special issue disrupts the grand discourse of nationality and breaks the boundaries of "inside and outside." Finally, by focusing on quite young children and their voices and ideas, the authors recognize the marginality of children themselves and act upon that.

Conversation as a Collaborative Practice

This special issue is a collaborative practice in the sense that it is a conversation not just between authors but also between editors, reviewers, and readers. Drawing on Deleuze's conception of dialogues, we, editors, authors, reviewers, and readers are points "who functioned simply as temporary, transitory and evanescent points of subjectivation." (Gilles Deleuze, 1977, p. ix) What matters is the collection of bifurcating, divergent, and muddled lines that constitute these special issues as a "multiplicity and which passed between the points, carrying them along without ever going from the one to the other." (Gilles Deleuze, 1977, p. ix) The authors of this issue are all researchers and educators who have finished their dissertations within three years or are finishing their dissertation writing currently. The reviewers involved senior scholars and Ph.D. students in different stages, each providing different windows on theory, writing, presentation, publication, advice, and friendship with new colleagues.

Both guest co-editors for these special issues are late-stage Ph.D. candidates with nearly completed dissertations, and we view ourselves as emerging scholars in the field of reconceptualizing early childhood education. We express gratitude to Marianne (Mimi) Bloch, the journal's editor, for inviting us to co-edit, contribute to, and learn the "art" of co-editing and publishing through this two-part series of articles (eight articles in each of Part I and II) for the *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies* journal.

We also want to acknowledge the sponsorship of the *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies* by the Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education organization (see reconceptualizingearlychildhoodeducation.org). This support is important to us as new academic researchers, as well as to those pursuing reconceptualist studies in early childhood education and critical childhood policy in diverse international contexts.

The special issue is organized alphabetically by the authors' names, from A to Z. The articles did not follow a particular order; they responded to each other in their own way, like the subterranean shoots of a rhizome, without beginning or end. The following section introduces each article through its argument, methods, research questions, and contribution. We highlight several lines that connect these articles. For example, some articles denaturalize the normalized conceptions of children by working on developmentally appropriate, health, and deficient discourse. Some articles decentralized Eurocentric images of children and deconstructed the borders of nationality through a focus on immigrant children, refugee children, and bilingual children. However, the conversations these articles have with each other are not predetermined. As editors, we invite readers to draw lines and connections between articles in your way.

Ame Christiansen's article unpacks disability and inclusivity in early childhood education through a post-qualitative inquiry using a Bush Kinder program in Naarm

(Melbourne), Australia. Christiansen challenges essentialist, developmental, and ableist conceptions of child development by embracing post-foundational perspectives (critical posthumanism, feminist new materialism, common worlds). Employing pedagogical narration as its method, the study examines human and more-than-human intra-actions, advocating for neuro-affirming, relational pedagogies. The article highlights localized, multisensory encounters to disrupt dominant deficit-based models of disability. Christiansen offers a provocative rethinking of inclusivity and early childhood pedagogy beyond normative discourses.

Nidhi Menon's article critiques deficit discourses surrounding refugee children in Canadian contexts by denaturalizing developmentalist frameworks that emphasize trauma and vulnerability. Through a feminist ethnographic approach, the article situates children as competent social actors, highlighting their agency, identities, and social relations. By amplifying the voices of refugee children, Menon contributes to transformative conversations about equity and inclusion in early childhood education and the politics of belonging.

Alexandra Nordström's article on joy explores the interplay between joy and literacy practices in Finnish early childhood education through a relational and post humanist lens. By employing post-qualitative and non-representational methodologies, Nordström examines how literacy emerges as dynamic, multimodal, and entangled with social, material, and affective dimensions. The article highlights the transformative potential of joy in fostering children's meaning-making, emphasizing relational, material, and embodied interactions. Through ethnographic data and theoretical provocations, the article advances understanding of literacy as a complex, affective practice, offering innovative pedagogical insights for creating equitable and engaging early childhood literacy environments.

Ayesha Rabadi-Raol and Aura Pérez-González's article demonstrates how systemic change can create environments where educators and students thrive by centering the cultural knowledge, culturally informed practices, and contributions of immigrant educators of color. The article calls for immediate action to implement policies that value linguistic and cultural diversity, affirm the legitimacy of varied teaching approaches, and dismantle exclusionary structures within education. This work contributes to reconceptualizing educational systems that reflect and serve the richness of their communities.

Lindsay Schofield's article investigates a study conducted in an early childhood care and education (ECCE) setting and a Higher Education (HE) Childhood Studies classroom in the United Kingdom (UK). The research adopts a (post)qualitative paradigm that emphasizes the impersonal flows of affect through an ethics of care and argues the importance of a child's belongings, represented by objects and things. Furthermore, this article contributes to reimagining early childhood transitions by respecting the multiplicity of children's lived experiences and advocating for creating caring environments filled with love and support during transitions rather than focusing on control and discipline.

Meredith Whye's article interrogates a recent educational reform in Kenya that promises 'bespoke, innovative, and differentiated' education for that nation's youngest learners. However, the pedagogy and theoretical foundations of the reform are explicitly based on Jean Piaget's theory of stage development. Whye explores the contradictions in the reform, internally and externally, as students and teachers are left in a confused and muddled state. She questions why this reform still uses dated, Western, models born out of racism and colonialism, and calls for an approach that returns to the local, indigenous knowledge frameworks that have always existed in Kenya.

Xue Yin's article on denaturalizing health discourse in working with "disadvantaged children" through Project Head Start. It reviews two different models of working on health issues in Head Start studies. Drawing on Foucauldian studies, this article sketches three layers of theorization of "health" and their implications for education: the opposite of diseases, the mechanics of normal and pathological, and the discipline of daily life. Through the lens of biopower, Yin's article unfolds the notion of "health" and directs the focus on subjectivity, power circulation, and knowledge production in health practice.

Seongryeong Yu's article uses a comparative ethnographic case study of 10-year-old students' literacy practices that help children construct meaning and foster belonging. Based on Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of "becoming," this article underscores the need for inclusive practices that value diverse literacies and cultivate a sense of belonging among all students. Yu's article contributes to denaturalizing literacy as a deeply transformative practice that enables students to articulate, perform, and reconfigure their identities within diverse cultural and temporal contexts.

An Emerging Territory

"Territories exist only through actions, which means that they are in fact performance, both in the theatrical sense and in the sense that their very existence depends on their being performed. It is these performances which 'affect' their territory and make it into an affected space, a space crisscrossed with affects" (Despret & Morrison, 2021, p. 125) The special issues engage with an emerging territory that exists through the concerns in the field, the questions put forward, and the methods used to address the questions. We take the special issues as "affected space," which inspires new conversations, perspectives, and practices to reimage children, pedagogy, and learning. This is a territory that is emerging. We hope that you now, as readers, enjoy and engage with the work presented.

References

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