

# Critical Scholarship and Policy Debates Editors' Introduction

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## Scholarship and Policy Debate in New Times

Since the last issue of the *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies Journal* (2011), there has been an expansion of the editorial board and reorganization of the journal's sections and purposes. While the co-editors remain the same (Marianne Bloch and Gaile Cannella), a new team of wonderful associate, assistant, copy, and journal section editors has arrived to lead the journal during the next few years and, hopefully, beyond. As the editorial team, we hope that the new sections allow for flexibility in submissions, diverse authorship, and the ability to respond to the interests of readers from around the world pertaining to research, policy, curriculum, programs, and pedagogical discussions of childhood (early childhood as well as youth culture and studies). We continue to acknowledge the significance of theoretical perspectives from various/multiple disciplines that examine "childhood" and policy studies shaping and constructing our political-economic, historical and cultural reasoning and actions as well as inclusionary and exclusionary actions. These are "new" times with advancing global agendas that focus on privatization, capitalisms, and standardized teaching, children, and childhood(s). While this journal focuses on scholarly research, by design, it will also be open to new ways to represent issues of importance related to critical childhood policy studies.

The *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies Journal* is now sponsored by the funds available to the Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education (RECE) conferences which are held annually in different parts of the world. The history of RECE can be found at [receinternational.org](http://receinternational.org). While RECE helps to sponsor the journal, it is open for submissions by any author/s representing diverse geographic, contextualized, and specific spaces and places, varying interests, questions and/or debate. Over the 24 years of RECE conferences, there has been an emphasis on including work from the psychological sciences (e.g., especially critically-oriented developmental psychology, child development, educational and psychoanalytic studies), as well as from anthropological, sociological, philosophical, historical, political-economic, cultural, visual or artistic, and literary studies of childhood/s. This journal, especially, focuses on critical theoretical lenses which can address questions that often go unasked in more mainstream journals. These types of questions include but are not limited to: what forces are propelling a certain set of assumptions about what is true, what voices or discourses are legitimated/which are not, and what notions of scholarship might be used to "know" what *is*, or possibly more importantly, what "might be?" Critical theoretical lenses are not well represented in many journals focused on early childhood or youth studies internationally, and for this reason, the journal was created and reinvigorated in 2016.

We invite special issues and solo submissions from many who hope to take a *hard* or *different* look at what is taken for granted in research, policy, curriculum, and pedagogical practices related to childhood, children and youth,

families, and programs; we invite submissions about and from teaching and teachers as well as caregivers and caregiving; we invite submissions that interrogate the division of care/education in much of childhood and educational studies and in policy. We hope the various sections invite a diverse group of contributions that add debate and interrogation of current events, beliefs, policies, or practices, where there is little or none. We also hope that our purposes, in adding different disciplinary and theoretical lenses to current discussions, will provide a broader way to examine, from a critical standpoint, beliefs, values, curriculum and teaching, as well as policy. By drawing on diverse theoretical frameworks and positionings including--feminist and gender studies, women/people of color, cultural and media studies, postcolonial, decolonizing, and indigenous worldviews, critical structural, post-structural, and posthumanist studies of childhood--new questions may be asked. We expect new topics might be examined and a different set of ideas, questions and ethical beliefs and practices may emerge that help us all think and act with inclusivity, and an “eye” toward social justice, and greater equality and equity in and across global/local contexts.

The sections of the journal may change over time to remain flexible, as well as to encourage multiple possibilities for ongoing debates and discussions. However, for now, we have followed several principles in developing sections for the journal:

1. We hope the journal and its publications will provide an open-space for ideas to emerge that will add to dialogue, open new spaces for action or policy debates, and illuminate diverse voices and perspectives broadening the notions of what might or ought to be vs. what “is.”
2. We want the journal to offer a space for excellent scholarship and research that uses different theoretical or methodological approaches than are common to many current journals, thus opening a space for new scholarship to emerge and impact scholarly ideas, as well as political/pedagogical practice.
3. We hope that this journal will offer new spaces for current policy debates to be discussed, and, as necessary, critiqued. Thus a new section of the journal with an emphasis on “Critical Policy” has been added.
4. We want to open spaces for new voices that often seem delegitimized in “scholarship” and many current journals; these include voices and experiences about and from teaching and teachers, caregiving and caregivers, children, parents, and community members, defined broadly. For this reason, there is a new section on “Community/Teaching/Family Perspectives.”
5. We accept books for review in a new section titled “Book Reviews.” We hope to review selectively books that have a critical stance on an important topic and new volumes that help us amplify our ways of thinking about an issue, problem, policy, or practice—books that are theoretically sophisticated and illuminating at the same time.

### **Moving Forward: International Critical Childhood Policy Studies in “Dangerous Times”**

The journal is being relaunched in 2016 with an exciting first essay, co-authored by Mathias Urban and Beth Blue Swadener, titled “Democratic accountability and contextualized systemic evaluation: A comment on the OECD initiative to launch an International Early Learning Study (IELS)” presented in the Critical Policy section. The essay was written on behalf of

members of the 2016 RECE conference (held in Taupo, New Zealand, October 27-November 3, 2016.) It has been deliberated and reviewed by the editors, independent peer reviewers, and has had one hundred people sign on as supporters of the document from approximately 15 nations at the time of publication in this journal. It was first published December 14, 2016 on [www.receinternational.org](http://www.receinternational.org). The full article is published in the “Critical Policy” section of the journal with a brief introduction provided by Mathias Urban (the first author and editor of the Critical Policy section of the journal) and Beth Blue Swadener.

As editors of the *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies Journal*, we chose to publish this article at a time of possible impact on debates, the process of collaboration, and/or the enactment and implementation of the assessment the OECD is planning. We support and concur with the essay’s critique of early assessment, and the breadth and scope of the neoliberal standardized testing movement, its ties with corporate interests, and the “pushing down” of a PISA-like comparison that would force young children, their teachers and families to accept decontextualized, culturally and linguistically insensitive practices. The OECD has a long history, as Urban and Swadener write, of doing research as well as policy initiatives with strong country collaboration. In this case, these precedents, valued so much in previous OECD work with and about young children, appear to be forgotten, overlooked, or intentionally dismissed. The critique is not only important, but is part of a growing movement to resist the current testing trend, and this OECD initiative, more specifically.

In the context of the OECD International Early Learning Study, as the authors explain, other countries and groups have begun to debate and refuse participation in this initiative, while others have begun to critique the process, particularly the lack of consultation and the universal, standardized nature of the proposed assessments. By publishing the essay by Urban and Swadener, along with signatures of those who support the statement, we hope to add to the dialogue as well as to the critique and resistance that is currently taking place.

### **Toward 2017**

In the early part of 2017, we will publish a special issue co-edited by Flora Forago, Colette Murray, and Beth Blue Swadener on “Anti-bias early childhood education.” Several other issues are in the planning and review stage, though new submissions of ideas or articles, book reviews, or essays are very welcome. Future issues of the journal will focus on international, critical childhood studies /policy issues of significance. Each piece in any special issue, and in the majority of sections of the journal, will undergo peer review, with author identification removed. On occasion, in the policy and book review sections, the editors may publish important debates, position papers that should be noted, or links to other important documents already published elsewhere. While we will continue to publish important peer-reviewed scholarship in several issues each year, we are also determined to bring timely and critically important issues to an international audience as quickly as possible, without cost, through an open-access journal system.

These are dangerous times that require diverse approaches to scholarship from various disciplines and an examination of questions and issues through a variety of theoretical and methodological lenses. We want to reiterate the importance of a scholarly journal that highlights a breadth of perspectives and methodologies as well as “voices and experiences” in the examination of important issues related to childhood studies (early childhood and “childhoods”). As the journal is free, open-access by design and our intent, it is accessible to everyone around the world as each issue is published. The possibility for communicating with each other about significant, even dangerous, issues and perspectives will add to knowledge about global/local issues and contribute to a broadening of knowledge by hearing from diverse communities world-wide or from often overlooked but critical voices.

It is an exciting and vastly important time to reignite this journal’s scholarly publications. We want to thank Mathias Urban and Beth Blue Swadener for taking the lead in authorship of the essay produced under the Critical Policy section, those who have helped to craft this article, and the many who have supported it. The essay, *Democratic accountability and contextualised systemic evaluation A comment on the OECD initiative to launch an International Early Learning Study (IELS)*, highlights the importance of interrogation and debate in critical childhood policy studies.