

Post-Foundational & Critical Childhood Studies: New and Emerging Scholarship – Part II

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Authors' Note

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Xue Yin is also a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is interested in discourse analysis, postfoundational theories, and critical studies in early childhood studies and teacher education. Her recent scholarship focuses on how health discourse reinscribes structural inequities and racial disparities through the cyber loop of bio-foundationalism and cultural normalization.

Xue and Meredith are both emerging scholars in the Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education Graduate Circle (see receinternational.org for a description of RECE as an organization and the Graduate Circle). During the summer of 2024, Xue and Meredith began their collaboration on the two-part special issue, after discussions with Marianne Bloch, Professor Emerita in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Editor of the *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies* journal. They both deeply appreciate the conversation and collaboration that made this special issue possible. Correspondence or questions can be addressed to xyin32@wisc.edu or whye@wisc.edu.

Abstract

This second part of the *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies*' special issue, *Embracing the Multiple: Emerging Critical Scholarship in Early Childhood Education*, explores the diversity of critical early childhood scholarship. This issue examines how themes such as play, trust, and power are negotiated across various educational contexts, from global to local settings. Drawing on posthumanist theories, the issue challenges traditional human/nonhuman distinctions and critiques hierarchical, Eurocentric narratives in early childhood education. By embracing post-qualitative methodologies, the contributors integrate theory with diverse research approaches—autoethnography,

participatory research, video-cued ethnography—offering insights into relational dynamics and emergent educational practices. This collection reimagines early childhood education, advocating for transformative approaches that recognize children’s agency, cultural identities, and the complexities of their lived experiences.

Keywords: multiplicity, critique, early childhood, postfoundational theory and methodology

Introduction

Part I of this special issue, *Post-Foundational & Critical Childhood Studies: New and Emerging Scholarship-Part I*, engaged with conversations inspired by post-foundational theories. Part I was published in December 2024 with eight articles and we encourage readers to go to it at the following link: <https://journals.sfu.ca/iccps/index.php/childhoods/issue/view/31>.

The second set of articles, published in February 2025, is titled *Postfoundational and Critical Childhood Studies: New and Emerging Scholarship - Part II*. These articles, we believe, demonstrate the diversity of critical scholarship in early childhood studies. Therefore, multiplicity and critique are the highlights of Part II of this special issue. We highlight some of the aspects of multiplicity and critique as well as briefly describe each author’s work below.

Multiplicity

This issue investigates themes such as how concepts like play, trust, power, and the adult/child dichotomy are negotiated and contested within various educational scenarios. From geopolitical landscapes, such as Germany to Indonesia, China, Denmark, United States, and Ireland, the articles in this issue engage with overlooked realities (geographically, culturally, or temporally) to expand understandings of the worlds in which children live, learn, and make sense of the world.

As such, this special issue is a contribution of “multiplicity” (Deleuze, 1994) in the sense that it implies no prior identity; it is a potential determined by reciprocal relations. We take it as a multiple-idea connection actualized in diverse spatio-temporal relationships, at the same time as its elements are actually incarnated in a variety of terms and forms. Therefore, this special issue explores the complexities and nuances of early childhood studies by focusing on the relationships between children, educators, communities, and broader societal and techniques that actualize how we experience the concepts, statements, discourse and knowledge of early childhood.

As part of this exploration, several scholars engage with posthumanism to interrogate and challenge established categories of human and nonhuman, emphasizing the dynamic and contingent nature of these distinctions. Posthumanism, as framed by thinkers like Barad (2007) and Braidotti (2024), rejects the anthropocentric view that positions humans as the central, dominant beings within a hierarchical framework of nature. Instead, it reimagines a world where human and nonhuman agents are mutually constituted through entanglements and interactions, reshaping our understanding of subjectivity, agency, and power. This view challenges not only traditional hierarchies but also colonial, racist, and monolingual narratives embedded in early childhood education. Through the lens of posthumanism, the articles in this issue engage with these critiques, positioning children’s experiences as fluid, emergent, and relational, calling for a radical reimagining of early childhood education that transcends human-centered, Western, and Eurocentric norms.

Methodologically, the issue's articles also embrace a range of approaches, including mixed-use of autoethnography, participatory research, video-cued ethnography, comparative policies studies, and theoretical reviews. All the scholars engage with a sense of post-qualitative methodology (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011; Mazzei & Jackson, 2024), which pushes researchers to entangle theory with data. These methods demonstrate how different approaches collaborate with each other offering new insights into the relational and emergent qualities of teaching and learning. Through these multiple methods, the articles challenge conventional educational paradigms and invite both researchers and practitioners to rethink their roles in fostering/conceptualizing children's experiences.

Critique

Engaging with post-foundational theories, this special issue takes critique in the sense of “not to be governed thus, like this, in this way” (Foucault, 2024, p. 56); it is a rejection of governmentality. The intention of critique is not a matter of judging and choosing; it is a matter of getting away, getting away from the unified truth, established narratives of children, childhood, and pedagogy. In this sense, this special issue is also a collection of critical policy analyses. It aims to denaturalize the established truth of the current policies in different scenarios to provoke other possibilities.

Early childhood education plays an unquestionable part of children's early experiences. However, as educational systems become more globalized and thus, more similar or “universal,” it is crucial to highlight scholarship that critically examines and calls for change—change in not only early childhood education but also how we conceive of children and childhoods. This collection of articles argues for perspectives that are reflective of multiple educational, cultural, and societal needs. Central to this transformation is the idea of the ‘right’ child and ‘right’ way to teach, such as the concept of best practices (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013). These ideas tend to dominate educational settings, especially as ideas from “Eurocentric/Western” ways of seeing flow and ebb in other educational and cultural contexts. Yet, these perspectives often fail to account for the complexity and multiplicity of children's lived experiences across cultures and contexts. This special issue highlights the multiplicity of not just children in space and time but also the ways we think, teach, and approach children.

Part II's authors and articles approach early childhood education critically by focusing on how power dynamics, policies, and ideologies shape educational practices, particularly for marginalized and multilingual children. The themes of this special issue align with the understandings of early childhood as articulated in *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care* (2013),

...the early childhood institution should be understood and developed as a public institution, a forum and a children's space, a site for encounter and relating, where children and adults meet and commit to something, where they can dialogue, listen and discuss in order to share meanings. We think that as such, it has the potential for an infinite range of possibilities—cultural, linguistic, social, aesthetic, ethical, political and economic—some expected and predetermined, but many that are not (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013, pp. xix-xx).

The scholars of this special issue emphasize examining the underlying structures and assumptions that often go unnoticed or unchallenged in traditional educational settings. They seek to question dominant narratives and practices, such as monolingualism or Eurocentric educational standards, and instead highlight diverse, inclusive, and equitable approaches that value children's cultural, linguistic, and social identities.

Together, this collection of articles deconstructs and (re)constructs elements of early childhood education—such as care, agency, affect, trust, adult/child dichotomy, and children’s understandings of their environments—challenging traditional views of children and childhood. By engaging with feminist theory, posthumanism, critical pedagogy, and cross-cultural studies, the contributions in this issue center on the experiences of marginalized groups, particularly children, and reimagine early childhood education systems through a transformative lens.

Overview of Special Issue

The articles in this special issue are organized the same as in Part I; the authors’ articles are ordered alphabetically by last name. We invite readers to form connections, threads, and themes among the varied methodologies, geographies, and theoretical frameworks.

Alexander’s article engages with teacher experience through a diffractive lens. Based on relational and socio-material theory, Alexander’s research uses Spring Creek Elementary as a case to explore the relationship between representational knowledge and material experiences through the actions and voices of participants. This research invites teachers to reflect on using media and materials for activities and assessments in a diverse setting. It also provokes administrators and professionals to rethink the evaluation paradigm.

Macha & Claßen’s research elevates children’s perspectives on the quality of early childhood education, advocating for the recognition of children as active agents capable of contributing meaningfully to discussions about pedagogy and system-level decisions. Through participatory research, they demonstrate how children’s voices can be a part of changing educational systems.

MacCrimmon’s article delves into the feminist ethics of care model within Denmark’s family childcare system. Highlighting the professionalization of care and collective responsibility, MacCrimmon challenges the gendered and hierarchical dynamics that have historically shaped caregiving roles, offering alternatives to reconceptualize the value of care in early childhood education.

Pase’s study of rural Indonesian kindergartens presents a case for the non-interventionist approach to children’s play. Pase’s video-cued ethnography reveals how children engage with materials and peers in culturally grounded, socially meaningful ways, underscoring the importance of context in shaping pedagogical practices.

Qi’s research investigates early childhood teachers’ diverse experiences and counternarratives through scenarios from the U.S. and China. Using video-cued multivocal ethnography, her research engages with poststructuralist feminist theories through an intersectional perspective to denaturalize teachers’ professionalism and emphasizes the local and culturally specific narratives. Qi’s research shows us how teachers from diverse socio-cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds narrate their gender performance of teaching professionalism.

Smyth’s article on bogs and relationality reimagines the concept of belonging by challenging human-centric, racialized, and nationalist views. Using feminist-relational paradigms and new materialism, Smyth explores two points of data—children’s engagement with a fence and the author’s reflection on the Irish Bog—to show how belonging is a dynamic, relational process that involves both human and more-than-human entities. The article incorporates Black feminist theories like Black refusal and Black futurity and calls for further inquiry into how belonging can be understood as a relational practice that challenges colonial and racial boundaries.

Umezawa's article examines how Head Start educators in rural New Immigrant Settlement areas understand and implement the 2007 Head Start language policy. This policy, which emphasizes bilingualism and biliteracy, has been challenging for monolingual teachers. This study reveals that while some teachers actively work to implement bilingual practices, there are significant gaps in their understanding of the policy and its application, often due to personal language ideologies. The research highlights the influence of local community dynamics, teachers' backgrounds, and pressures, which often prioritize English language acquisition over bilingualism.

Challenges and Opportunities for Change Call for Further Inquiry

Together, the two special issues (Part I, published in December 2024 and Part II, published here) spark important conversations about the future(s) of early childhood education. By centering children's voices and culturally grounded pedagogies, these two special issues, we hope and believe, push the boundaries of traditional and long-dominant early childhood frameworks.

Further scholarship and action are needed to build on the insights shared in this issue. Researchers, educators, and policymakers are invited to engage with these perspectives and continue exploring how early childhood education can be reimagined to better serve the needs of all children. The contributions here challenge us to think critically and creatively about the future of early childhood education and the possibilities for change.

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