

Resisting neoliberalism: Professionalisation of early childhood education and care ^[1]

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Excerpted from Abstract

Despite the relevance of early childhood services to children, families and nation states, the sector is largely undervalued and under resourced and, is not recognised as an established profession. Using collaborative auto ethnography, researchers from six different countries (Australia, Chile, England, Germany, Ireland and the United States) all members of the EECERA Professionalisation Special Interest Group (P-SIG) share their reflections on the professionalisation of early childhood. While professionalisation is associated with discretionary decision making that is premised upon an accepted body of knowledge, neoliberalism imposes constraints from on top, identifying through various forms of curricula, legislated standards, and policies what is appropriate and desirable practice. As a consequence, early childhood personnel are restricted in their professional agency and, their work is characterised by tension, as they strive to balance external expectations from a neoliberal stance and their own perspectives that prioritise a children's rights perspective. This paper questions how the sector manages the constraints imposed on it in a neoliberal political and social world. It calls upon those in the profession to resist neoliberalism and, to make a stand in terms of what is considered best practice. It further argues that ongoing debate is required as to the boundaries of what would be called the early childhood profession: considerations of ways in which the different sectors (education, health, and welfare) contribute to a holistic approach in working with children balanced against the requirement for a profession to have an identified and discrete body of knowledge. The implications of this for professionalisation of early childhood are widespread and, worthy of debate. While the inclusion of different sectors for example, addresses the holistic nature of early childhood work, it risks creating a broad and diffused knowledge base that might make it difficult to claim professionalisation. We hope that this paper contributes to reenergizing conversations on the professionalisation of the early childhood sector.

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