

Theorizing feminist ethics of care in early childhood practice: Possibilities and dangers ^[1]

Author: Langford, Rachel - Introduction, and multiple chapter authors

Source: Bloomsbury Collections

Format: Book / booklet

Publication Date: 1 Jan 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access full book online ^[2]

Excerpted from introduction

Rachel Langford

The idea for this edited volume emerged from a failure to resist thinking about care in early childhood education and care (ECEC). In the 1980s, when I worked in both early childhood and elementary school settings, I bristled when others described my care of young children as natural, an assumption no doubt based on my gender. Later, taking a graduate studies course on the philosophy of care in education, I was suspicious of readings by Nel Noddings (1988) and drawn to Claudia Card's article on caring and evil (1990). I found some middle ground in Robin Dillon's (1992) concept of care respect, which Amy Mullin takes up in this volume's chapter on nurturing hope to support children's autonomy. Later in my working life I focused on professionalism while teaching postsecondary early childhood education (ECE) students, but something about care continued to hover at the back of my thinking.

In 2013, I began to think about teaching a course on children and care as a way to investigate my conflicts with care in ECEC. This course, now delivered for several years to university students across many disciplines, explores the possibilities and controversies in ethics of care literature in relation to the lives of children and families at the personal, political, and global levels.

At the same time, my research shifted from a focus on professionalization as a Canadian childcare advocacy strategy to theorizing and framing a robust and coherent integration of care, ethics of care, and care work into Canadian childcare advocacy, policy, and practice. (This is not to suggest that professionalization and care are incompatible.) It could be said that I have now embraced care ethics as a focus of my teaching and research. As Carol Gilligan (2011: 177), often associated with the origins of care ethics, has urged, rather than resisting care, I have "joined the resistance" to patriarchy and other forms of oppression that seek to deny the caring capacities that constitute the humanity of all citizens of a democracy. Gilligan writes:

Once the ethic of care is released from its subsidiary position within a justice framework, it can guide us by framing the struggle in a way that clarifies what is at stake and by illuminating a path of resistance grounded not in ideology but in our humanity. If along the path we lose our way, we can remind ourselves to listen for voice, to pay attention to how things are gendered, and to remember that within ourselves we have the ability to spot a false story. (2011: 43)

This edited volume draws on the spirit of this resistance to meet two aims. The first is to lift the "aura of invisibility" of "the very common and everyday nature" of care relations in ECEC (Bowden 1997: 5–6). As Gilligan states, this aim is pressing in a time in which false stories distort what really matters in ECEC. To this end, chapter authors offer contemporary and in-depth theorizations of feminist ethics of care in early childhood practice, illuminating its possibilities for personal, professional, and social transformation.

The second aim is to assert that everything about care in ECEC is inescapably political and dangerous. Chapter authors address these dangers by highlighting political and policy priorities and decisions that constrain early childhood practices and reproduce social inequalities in care relations and care work. In addressing these dangers, chapter authors point to openings for social change. Overall, this unique volume seeks to contribute to ethics of care scholarship that is "burgeoning across many disciplines" (Engster and Hamington 2015: 4).

Region: International ^[3]

Tags: care work ^[4]

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/22/01/theorizing-feminist-ethics-care-early-childhood-practice> [2]

<https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/theorizing-feminist-ethics-of-care-in-early-childhood-practice-possibilities-and-dangers/introduction> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/international> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9065>