

Professionalisation of early childhood education and care practitioners: Working conditions in Ireland ^[1]

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Abstract

The last decade has revealed a global (re)configuring of the relationships between the state, society and educational settings in the direction of systems of performance management. In this article, the authors conduct a critical feminist inquiry into this changing relationship in relation to the professionalisation of early childhood education and care practitioners in Ireland, with a focus on dilemmatic contradictions between the policy reform ensemble and practitioners' reported working conditions in a doctoral study. The critique draws from the politics of power and education, and gendered and classed subjectivities, and allows the authors to theorise early childhood education and care professionalisation in alternative emancipatory ways for democratic pedagogy rather than a limited performativity. The findings reveal the state (re)configured as a central command centre with an over-reliance on surveillance, alongside deficits of responsibility for public interest values in relation to the working conditions of early childhood education and care workers, who are mostly part-time 'pink-collar' women workers in precarious roles. The study has implications that go beyond Ireland for the professionalisation of early childhood education and care workers and meeting the early developmental needs of young children.

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