

Staying with the trouble of datafication in early childhood education ^[1]

Author: Paananen, M., Archer, N., Albin-Clark, J., Roberts-Holmes, G., Chung, J., & Siippainen, A.

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Excerpt

What can we know without data? Data have become trusted friends of officials, policymakers and professionals working in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) field with tempting promises of more accurate knowledge of children's learning, and more efficiency, transparency and improved quality of services. Following these aspirations, many aspects of the daily lives of children and educators in ECEC settings are rendered into data. In particular, digital systems intensify earlier practices of databasing and using information as a resource for decision-making. Often this is related to an imaginary of dataism; a belief in the objective, useful transformation of all kinds of human behaviour into collectible, analysable and commodifiable records through digital systems. This has been called 'datafication', and is the topic of this Special Issue.

The burgeoning growth of measuring ECEC and hopes and wishes related to it can be identified across the globe but takes different forms in different early childhood systems. Datafication in ECEC is increasingly enmeshed in globalised discourses exposing both its global reach and multiple, local interpretations and impacts. As Kerssens and van Dijck (2022, 2023) highlight, these local, national and transnational spheres are 'transgressed' enabling individual data to become prime assets in the global flow of resources. Yet, globalisation also means that despite the fact that the phenomena of datafication can be identified across contexts worldwide, it intertwines global and local contexts, so that manifestations of datafication vary locally.

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