

# Call for rethink to education systems which marginalise children

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## EXCERPTS

Mathias Urban, newly-appointed professor of early childhood at the University of Roehampton, said he wanted to 'make the case for a much more radical, democratic model in early education.'

He said, 'We know that education systems in many countries in the world marginalise [disadvantaged children]. All those systems were set up by education experts.'

In his hour-long lecture on Monday, Prof Urban, who is currently studying early childhood provision for Roma children in central and eastern Europe, criticised traditional approaches to research for not questioning underlying assumptions.

He said, 'We provide evidence for policy makers. But the [research] questions quite often imply the solutions. For example, there is an increasing move, particularly in early education, to raise literacy and numeracy levels. More education is offered as a solution. What if [education] isn't as straightforward as it seems, and is tangled up with structural injustice, oppression and blind racism? How would it be possible to reform the accepted world view with other knowledge?'

Prof Urban has previously written a thesis on his early experiences as a teacher where, he said, education was 'deeply embedded in the social, cultural, economic and political context of a society that structurally disadvantages children and families from minority backgrounds.'

Prof Urban also spoke of how 'early childhood education and care has become something of a panacea in a world of social crises'. He cited the example of US generals calling for better intervention in the early years to help 'ensure national security' - this in the context where 75 per cent of 17 to 24-year-olds in the US are now unable to serve in uniform because of the high prevalence of obesity, as well as their reasons such as failure to graduate high school, and having a criminal record.

His lecture also touched on key thinkers such as Freire and Froebel, whose idea that early education should be thought of as the basis for a democratic society - was 'as relevant now as they were radical then.'

He stopped short of setting out what form his research at Roehampton will take, but proposed his research programme would take into account the 'big picture', which included resisting 'normal science' (which he says should be challenged with asking 'why are things the way they are and who benefits from this').

Responding to the lecture was Professor Peter Moss from the Institute of Education. He said 'we are continually being offered solutions before we have asked critical questions. Mathias recognises another world is conceivable... and that education by itself can't bring that world about.'

**Region:** Europe [3]

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**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/07/call-rethink-education-systems-which-marginalise-children>

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