CRITICAL CULTURAL STUDIES OF CHILDHOOD

Home in Early Childhood Care and Education

Edited by
Andrew Gibbons · Sonya Gaches · Sonja Arndt
Mara Sapon-Shevin · Colette Murray
Mathias Urban · Marek Tesar

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Critical Cultural Studies of Childhood

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This series focuses on reframings of theory, research, policy, and pedagogies in childhood. A critical cultural study of childhood is one that offers a 'prism' of possibilities for writing about power and its relationship to the cultural constructions of childhood, family, and education in broad societal, local, and global contexts. Books in the series open up new spaces for dialogue and reconceptualization based on critical theoretical and methodological framings, including critical pedagogy; advocacy and social justice perspectives; cultural, historical, and comparative studies of childhood; and post-structural, postcolonial, and/or feminist studies of childhood, family, and education. The intent of the series is to examine the relations between power, language, and what is taken as normal/abnormal, good, and natural, to understand the construction of the 'other,' difference and inclusions/exclusions that are embedded in current notions of childhood, family, educational reforms, policies, and the practices of schooling. Critical Cultural Studies of Childhood will open up dialogue about new possibilities for action and research. Single-authored as well as edited volumes focusing on critical studies of childhood from a variety of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives are included in the series. A particular focus is in a reimagining and critical reflection on policy and practice in early childhood, primary, and elementary education. The series intends to open up new spaces for reconceptualizing theories and traditions of research, policies, cultural reasonings, and practices at all of these levels, in the United States, as well as comparatively.

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Conceptualizations and Reconfigurations

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This collection of chapters is dedicated to those who collaborate, to those who create their own caravans and travel together through difficult terrain, inclement weather, plague, and challenging times but who keep the caravan moving forward through shared purpose and love.

This book is also dedicated to the memory of Barbara O'Meara (1963-2023) who generously provided the cover image for this book. Barbara was an artist and activist, who worked continuously to give voice and bring attention to those who are marginalised in society, especially women and children. May she rest in peace.

Series Editors' Preface

In this series on "Critical Cultural Studies of Childhood," we have focused on transnational and critical studies of childhood and families, as well as educational places, spaces, and constructs. In this short preface, we highlight some of the contributions of this book as well as ways in which we think you, as reader, will find the book intellectually and educationally exciting.

This collaboratively edited volume features the work of transnational scholars reflecting on ways that notions of home are constructed by dominant cultural assumptions and how early education based on those assumptions is experienced by minoritized cultures, immigrant families, and children in poverty. Further, the authors problematize conceptions of geographical, social, or emotional stability drawn from a westernized, imperial/colonial notion of the "good or normal" home. The editors, led by Andrew Gibbons, deconstruct the taken-for-granted and fixed notions of "home" and "school" as places of belonging and safety as well as connectedness for young children and their families. In various chapters, the authors question what it means for early childhood programs to be "home-like" and how, in many situations, that might be problematic; they also interrogate how home-lessness, conceptually and physically, plays into experiences of teachers, families, and children.

Across the book, the authors draw on a rich and diverse set of theoretical and conceptual perspectives to highlight the many ways that educational literature, policies, and practice reify dominant notions of a classed, racialized, and colonial imaginary of home and home-school similarities. Contributors in this volume find hope in deconstructing not only the

physical borders that geographically separate us but those that metaphorically continue to otherize and dehumanize those sitting on the other side. They complicate taken-for-granted constructs of home and unpack it as lived experience, metaphor, theory, and its policy-informing implications. Their use of the more than human in their framing of place and their call for a fluid, rhizomatic, and nomadic conception of home-school pushes us toward new critiques of what "is," and opens spaces for fabricating more socially just policies and practices. Finally, they draw from a rich and nuanced range of settings/contexts and life experiences.

A few of the questions raised in the book are:

- What does it mean to call a place home? What does home-less mean?
- How can *home* be both problematic and, at the same time, critical to ECCE and beyond?
- How do families and educators understand and/or (co-)create the experience of home?
- How do the experiences of migrant families and young immigrant children raise issues and contradictions to common sense understandings of home?
- How do global migrations and borderlands experiences shape constructions of home and belonging?
- When home is dangerous, denied, or multi-sited as with transborder communities, where is home?
- What meanings do "homeland" and homeland security have for immigrant and asylum-seeking families?
- What meanings do homeland security have for those whose homes and cultures are stigmatized, marginalized, or constantly at risk for being taken in their own country? In which ways do feelings of "belonging," that the construct *home* suggests, travel across geographic places and conceptual spaces as well as time?
- How do young children, their families, and educators build relationships based on activism, a sense of social justice, and upon a sense of home and cultural identities through strategic alliances, or in collaboration?
- How would an ethics of hospitality and relationality toward others as well as notion of care and welcome rather than hostility or superiority/inferiority shift policy as well as practices?

Varied theoretical perspectives are highlighted in almost every chapter in the book. Arndt, Gibbons, Guerrero and Gibbons, Tesar, and Urban draw on the work of Barad, Braidotti, Deleuze and Guattari, and Mouffe to highlight home as a blurred or fluid concept, and one that requires opening up to scrutiny and new possibilities. In the introductory chapter, Gibbons (p. 2) highlights the authors' contributions by speaking of a nomadic unsettling that takes place throughout the book:

> Our sense of where home is and what home means to us—and could mean—shifts and moves with time, with experiences, and with new and unexplored possibilities. There is a nomadic unsettling as we engage with and dwell within these relations of home.

In addition, other contributors (e.g., Gaches, Habashi, Maldonado and Swadener, Murray, and Sapon-Shevin) focus on home and the constructed home-lessness of those who have fled their countries, and/or been displaced, colonized, and marginalized within their lands. They draw on work by Anzaldua, hooks, Freire, and Border Crit Theory.

As readers see from these illustrations and will see throughout the book, the contributors push the boundaries of education and other fields as they unpack the common and taken-for-granted notion that "homes" are the same, and, in a romanticized fashion, always safe and nurturing. As with other books in this series, the authors destabilize and deepen the theoretical and conceptual understanding of childhoods, with policy and pedagogical implications.

Madison, WI, USA — Marianne N. Bloch
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The Things of Home: Histories, People, Stories, Belonging

Welcome to Home: An Introduction

Andrew Gibbons, Mara Sapon-Shevin, Sonya Gaches, Mathias Urban, Colette Murray, Marek Tesar, and Sonja Arndt

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."
Lewis Carroll

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Reflections on Home: Escaping the Master

Welcome to a book about "home" in early childhood care and education (ECCE).

Home.

A word that appears at times, perhaps for many readers, so seemingly simple and obvious—its meaning seems to be clear, unambiguous, settled. Perhaps it is easy to shut one's eyes and to think of home—to visualize all the imagery, the metaphors and the experiences that have become as intimate and familiar as this thing called "home".

To be settled could be considered a key dimension or characteristic of what home means. Yet, in these pages you will find many different thoughts, theories, observations and experiences of the complexity of home for many communities of ECCE. Home is neither clear nor unambiguous, and as Murray explores in chapter "Heart(h)less: Negative-visibility and Positive-invisibility an Irish Travellers' Tale", for many communities home has quite a different meaning in relation to the idea of being settled.

Home, we believe, is not a settled concept. Home is an *essentially contested concept* that attracts significant scholarship and enduring disagreement (Meers, 2021). As such, home is a concept that requires unsettling. More than this, for many communities, home is a deeply problematic

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concept that exposes not just a diversity of beliefs and experiences, but also histories of colonization revealing the present, and some possible futures, of oppression and discrimination—as well as immense and radical possibilities for openness and care.

These possibilities are played out in the dialogue between Alice and Humpty Dumpty that frames this introduction. Alice's question reflects a concern for meaning. She's disrupted by Humpty Dumpty's confidence with meaning, and perhaps inquisitive as to the implications of Humpty appearing to reject any authority with regards the wisdom of words. Can home mean whatever one wants it to mean? Humpty, taking a seemingly radical relativistic position, argues that home can mean anything to anyone, and that words can (and from his perspective should) be subject to mastery. Mastery, as a kind of sovereignty, is of particular interest here. Home, as a word that can be mastered, is a word that has, in many configurations, been mastered to mean the mastered dwelling, the property of a master. Home becomes, in this way, a device that gathers together and divides. Home creates a "we" or "us", and a "them". Humpty Dumpty's rebuttal to Alice regarding the mastery of words is a reminder then to take seriously the meanings and experiences of the word "home".

We believe that it is vitally important to understand that home, as both a construct and a lived experience, is complexly connected to ECCE. In this book, each author engages with the complexity of home with a view to opening up meanings, challenging universal or assumed meanings, and thinking through the experiences of home for diverse communities. In this collective task, there is a concern with reconceptualizing home: to reveal, engage with, and rethink the manifestations of mastery that predict, prescribe and predominate the homes of many individuals and communities. In exploring home, we recognize the deep and broad connections of home: to place, to dwelling, to property; to the domestic, the family, the abode, and to accommodation. In their care and attention to many different histories, meanings and experiences of home, each author dwells differently in these relations of home.

This dwelling in relations of home engages with a nomadic theorization of home. Our sense of where home is and what home means to us—and could mean—shifts and moves with time, with experiences, and with new and unexplored possibilities. There is a nomadic unsettling as we engage with and dwell within these relations of home. As nomadic theorizations (see Braidotti, 2013, 2014, 2019; Jones et al., 2016; Mouffe, 1994) of home, each chapter recognizes and disrupts essentializations of home, and

of the static and settled figure of the human subject whose identity is more or less designed into and for certain privileged configurations of home. In working through the "hybridization and nomadization" (Mouffe, 1994: 110) of home, each chapter is concerned with questioning the *matter* of home as more than metaphor constrained by the limits of discourse (Braidotti, 2019).

Following Semetsky (2008: vii) on nomadic journeys into the disciplinary fields of education, the "forever-fixed and eternal" meanings can only appear to abide in educational institutions. The uncontainable, uncontrollable, movement of the nomadic (Semestsky, 2008) "occupies a variety of possible subject positions, at different places (spatially) and at different times (temporally), across a multiplicity of constructions of the self" (Vandenbroeck et al., 2009: 211). In this movement, recognition and disruption are processes that resonate with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) provocation to explore "spaces and ways of thinking that open new directions and routes in research practices and resist codified or normalized ways of thinking and acting" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2011: 26).

> In a nomadic research act, researchers would not necessarily follow already existing guidelines that define what counts as good research practice, but we would act toward the creation of new ways to confront dominant research practices and move toward seeking new potentials … asking, for example: Where else could this go? What kinds of new encounters are possible? What new "things" can race be linked to and, as a result, transformed and rearranged into something new? (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2011: 26)

The privileged configurations of home are a central point of concern in each chapter. Each chapter at the same time recognizes the "minorities" of home (Braidotti, 2013). "The minority is the dynamic or intensive principle of change in nomadic theory, whereas the heart of the (phallogocentric) Majority is static, self-replicating and sterile" (Braidotti, 2013: 344).

The authors of this book take home seriously and invite serious consideration of home within the broad and global, local and deep, contexts of early childhood care and education. Whether you are a teacher, a parent, a manager, a teacher educator, a researcher, an advocate, or a policy maker, these opening thoughts on home invite you to cross the threshold into this collection on home.

We welcome you.

The Predominance of Home

The idea of home is a predominant concept and experience in the development of contemporary ECCE philosophies and approaches. That predominance is evident in curriculum strategies and approaches, materials and resources, activities and lessons and interactions, and in the architecture and design of the physical spaces of an early childhood centre. Home is both the explicit attention to learning about home, and the tacit experiences of home that make up the environment.

But home is still more than this. Home, as a predominant experience, both constructs and connects children's private and public lives in subtle and silent ways. The silence of home makes it no less powerful as a knowledge that guides communities and governments in their rationales for the life of the young child and for those that are assigned responsibilities for the young child—responsibilities often referred to in terms of care, learning, development and education. Home as a predominant concept contributes to the diverse social, cultural, historical and political practices of ECCE. Home reveals abiding myths, meaningful narratives, and productive subjectivities for each child and adult. Home reveals complex relationships between governments, landowners, property developers, architects and communities (Lewis et al., 2018). Home intersects with the complexity of matter in the world. Take for example the meaning and experience of home in relation to the study and application of electricity, computation, and fossil fuels (and, and, and). Home also intersects with knowledge. Consider for example apparent advances in public health and medicine (see for instance Burch et al., 2014) and what they mean for the study of home. As life expectancies alter, so too do expectations about the meaning and experience of home; and as health practices alter, so too do the functions and experiences of the home alter in a myriad of explicit and subtle ways.

The arts also provide an understanding of the complexity of home. In poetry, the aesthetics of home are experienced as a tension between belonging and loss, "broken by incoherent words" (Compton, 2007: 16). Through the arts, home offers up many subjectivities, from the citizen whose "generic" dreams of home determine their own currency in relation to the economic progress of the nation (Turner, 2007: 81), to the "homeboy" for whom that same home becomes an absurdity (Warner, 2007: 70).

While this book cannot hope to engage exhaustively with the fullness of these intersections and interconnections, what we would like to highlight here is their generative immensity. We invite ECCE communities to follow their own lines of inquiry, and to be open to the complex ways in which their dynamic and ever-changing worlds bring new conceptualizations and understandings, and lead to new experiences of home. Each chapter in this book provides glimpses of this openness. These different perspectives and applications of home highlight the complexity of home, and the benefits of reconceptualizing home in its meaning and practice. In this book, we invite the amplification of the concept of home with an openness to home as a diverse, dynamic and complex concept and experience. As editors of this collection, we share a view that there are many voices to hear on this seemingly so familiar (for some) and yet so wonderfully and sometimes even frighteningly strange word.

ECCE takes place within the context of Global Capitalism. Global Capitalism is very clearly and unambiguously concerned with ECCE. With the growth of early childhood education, driven in part by a globalization of the early learning agenda (see for instance OECD's Starting Strong series), the young child is increasingly likely to attend an ECCE institution. More than this, many children have become the object of government policy because they are not attending an ECCE institution and are, as such, believed to be missing out on the benefits of such attendance. The institutionalization of learning and teaching, and the structuring of education systems to produce particular kinds of graduates has contributed to the characterizations of homes in relation to the educational system. Policies concerned with increasing attendance of target groups increasingly emphasize that these benefits mitigate against, and/or redress, systemic inequities, and at the same time contribute to better adult outcomes—in other words, to better communities. ECCE is strategized as better for the child in order to govern the child.

The child at home is a concern for this approach to government. A home in many communities is a place of learning occupations, responsibilities and relationships (see for instance Metge, 2015). In a global capitalist system, this privileging of home is a problem that must be solved—for instance pathologized as "condoned truancy" (see for instance Gibbons, 2007) in order to bring the home into line with the functions of the governance of the child. Without a home, children can also be regarded as a risk (Boyden, 2015) to both themselves and their communities. The home is, in this sense, not simply protection from the public gaze, it becomes the

policing of the child. Yet home is a place that some children must escape from (both the family home and the institutional home). Living on the street, being homeless, is safer for some children (Boyden, 2015). Hence children who are at home and children who are not at home become increasingly visible as risks to society—determined by assumptions about the appropriateness and the functions of the home.

With increases in ECCE attendance comes an associated decrease elsewhere. Children will be spending less time in their wider communities, and less time in their homes (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Part of the policy logic of this trade-off is that these communities and homes are believed to be more or less undesirable places for children to grow and to learn—undesirable that is, when compared to the desirability of a quality ECCE institution. For policy makers, ECCE can mitigate against the effect of home and to a certain extent replace approved or desired functions of home in terms of a child's early years—including the years often referred to as the "first thousand days" in developmental literature.

ECCE institutions are likely to employ the concept of home throughout their curriculum and daily operations, for example creating a homelike environment, incorporating items from children's homes into dramatic play, communicating with children's homes, etc. Somewhat ironically, or perhaps as an act of balancing, curricula attend more to the experience of home as the child spends less and less time at home. This perceived irony creates a context and backdrop for this edited collection.

Home appears as both a problem and a solution. As such, home is a critical concept to explore and engage with—as a critical concept, what are its meanings and its experiences, in what ways might these experiences and meanings be commensurable (or incommensurable), and what values and views inform these experiences and meanings? The nature of these questions speaks to a key dimension of this book—that of openness.

In this book we are developing a scholarship of home that is active, practical and affective. We do not see this scholarship as neutral, objective, distanced reflection and theorizations of home. The purpose here is to engage critically with the responsibilities and potentials within early childhood communities in relation to experiences of feeling at, being at, and understanding, complex concepts of home. A reconceptualization of the idea of home contributes to the many and diverse physical and conceptual spaces that intersect with, and in, early childhood communities.