

Perspectives on Children and Young People

Kylie Smith

Kate Alexander

Sheralyn Campbell *Editors*

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# Feminism(s) in Early Childhood

Using Feminist Theories in Research and  
Practice

 Springer

# **Perspectives on Children and Young People**

Volume 4

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Sheralyn Campbell  
Editors

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# Foreword

It was a delicious moment when this book arrived. Opening the pages of a new book about feminism(s) in early childhood edited by three women (Kylie Smith, Sheralyn Campbell and Kate Alexander) who have had a positively profound impact on my own life in early childhood as a feminist was tantalising.

I first met Kylie and Sheralyn in their undergraduate studies in the late 1980s and Kate in her undergraduate studies in the mid 2000s. Each stood out for their determination, insight, integrity and intellect; and, for their commitment to equity and justice. I had the agreeable privilege of supervising their undergraduate research studies, later their graduate research projects as well as working with them as colleagues. Since their undergraduate studies Kylie, Kate and Sheralyn have had diverse, sometimes intersecting trajectories in early childhood as administrators, managers, researchers, students and practitioners. For nearly two decades, I've watched them embrace complexity as a necessary friend in meeting injustice, galvanising their own feminist advocacy and practices and inspiring others to do the same.

Against this background, I anticipated that this book would be thoughtfully constructed to canvass a broad and complex sense of what feminism is, does and can do to make early childhood a more respectful space for children and those they live their lives with in early childhood. It does not disappoint. It seeks to show why feminism(s) are still needed in early childhood and how they are being actively used in different countries and different arenas of early childhood with important effect.

These goals are achieved powerfully by drawing on the work of feminists in early childhood in contexts as diverse as Pakistan, Kenya, Ireland, Australia, Indonesia, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States and who work as policy makers, researchers and practitioners. The editors' thoughtful choice of contributors means that the reader is intentionally engaged with a breadth of feminist concerns and contributions in early childhood. The book ranges from an analysis of structural inequalities for the girl child in Africa (Musomi and Swadener—Chap. 7) through inequities in the pay and conditions for care workers in Ireland (and beyond) (Murray—Chap. 8) to ways of reimagining the role of the feminist

researcher in micro-level research with children (Davies—Chap. 6) and with teachers in Pakistan (D'Souza Juma—Chap. 11).

Whilst policy frameworks, pay and conditions and the role of the researcher/researched relationships are not new concerns for feminists in early childhood (and beyond) the contributors to this volume craft compelling arguments about why and how feminism(s) are useful in current times in diverse early childhood contexts and arenas. This is not a simple, or a simplistic call for a feminist way in early childhood. Several chapters persistently embed aspects of 'intersectionality' (analysis of how racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc. are interconnected) in their analysis and so their calls to action are nuanced and contextualised. This is seen powerfully in Atkinson's intriguing and skilful exploration of gender relations, feminism and the struggle for decolonisation for Victorian Aboriginal people through the place of the didgeridoo in Australian early childhood programmes (see Chap. 2). It is also central to Salazar Pérez's well-argued case for 'endarkened' black feminist thought to become a persistent everyday essential to meaning-making in early childhood (see Chap. 4).

As several chapters demonstrate (e.g., Coady—Chap. 2; Osgood and Robinson—Chap. 4; and D'Souza Juma—Chap. 11) there is still lively debate about what feminism is and who counts as a feminist in early childhood (and beyond). Despite this, this volume solidifies the centrality to early childhood of feminists as its shapers and reshapers. We see in this in Coady's clear illustrations of the enduring and transformative legacy of early feminists as macro policy makers and service designers in Australia and in the work of Musomi and Swadener (Chap. 7), Murray (Chap. 8) and Simpson Dal-Santo (Chap. 13) we see feminists proactively reshaping its purposes in the contemporary and shifting policy contexts respectively of Kenya, Ireland and Australia.

Feminists across time and diverse contexts have also made the politics of the interpersonal and the micro-level of the everyday core targets to shape and reshape in their quest for gender equity and justice. The continuing need to do this in early childhood is potently and powerfully taken up by several contributors (e.g., Gaches—Chap. 10; Marpinjun and Ramsey—Chap. 12; and Osgood and Robinson—Chap. 4). Davies (Chap. 6) reminds us this is no simple or easy task as she challenges feminist researchers to negotiate what it means to research amongst the tensions and materiality of the lived gender order so that we are open to the not yet thought possibilities of what is right, proper and possible to live and enliven gender justices in early childhood. It is undeniably complex. However, despite its complexities feminists in early childhood in contexts as diverse as Australia, the United States, Pakistan and Indonesia are navigating them with a skill and a determination that produces a politics of optimism for the possibilities for gender justice when its impossibilities push toward them and at times surround them.

Given how persistently and consistently Kylie, Kate and Sheralyn have lived their feminism(s) in early childhood and navigated the complexities it has brought to them, it should be no surprise that they have been able to assemble a powerful and diverse group of writers in this volume who galvanise the new-wave

feminism(s) in early childhood and validate their value over time. They urge gender justice in and through its everyday policies and practices now and into the future and in doing so offer some possible points for navigation towards the not yet thought in which gender justice and equity might lie. For this reason, I believe that this book will be an inspiring catalyst and support for feminists in early childhood who driven by their indignation about the persistence of gender inequity, violence, oppression and misogynies in our societies strive to create a world in which gender justice and equity can prosper. The feminist imagination(s) that come to the fore in this volume powerfully illustrate how feminism(s) not only live in early childhood, but are essential to its capacity to shift and shape to enliven gender justice and equity in all its complex possibilities across sexualities, races, classes, abilities and borders.

It has been a personal-political pleasure and privilege to re-meet feminist colleagues from my time in early childhood and to meet early childhood feminists new to me in the pages of this book. For what they champion, imagine and reimagine through their feminism(s) the field of early childhood should be immensely grateful and proud. They have shaped a book that deserves a prominent space in the lives of all who live and work in early childhood or are about to.

Victoria, Australia  
August 2016

Glenda Mac Naughton



# Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the influence of Glenda Mac Naughton's feminist research and politics on our work. Initially as supervisor to each of us and now as a critical friend she has introduced us to multiple feminist theoretical, methodological, pedagogical and policy possibilities. Glenda has supported, challenged and inspired us to question taken for granted truths about gender performances and patriarchal dominance and violence. Her work and her questions have enabled us to map many different paths to creating change. We thank her for modelling how to live feminist politics in everyday life and for constantly supporting others to work together to share and enact their own feminism(s).

We would also like to acknowledge the work of Elizabeth Dau (1942–2015) and the anti-bias work that she undertook and supported in Australia in early childhood education and care. She has also made it possible for us to travel feminist paths in early childhood pedagogy and policy.

We would like to thank our colleagues Anne Farrelly and Jessica Crofts for their support and assistance in bringing this book together and to our families who support us in our work.

Thanks go to the many women and men whose daily work in early childhood education begins with asking questions about how social justice is experienced and who are so brave in their attempts to make changes.

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# Editors and Contributors

## About the Editors

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**Kate Alexander** is a Senior Administrator in the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education where she provides support to staff located in the Youth Research Centre. Previously, she worked as a Research Fellow on a variety of research projects, grants and publications development exploring equity issues in early childhood. She has completed a Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies (Hons), a Master of Education (Research) that focused on gender and early childhood and is currently undertaking a Ph.D. on the life histories of researchers that explore gender in early childhood.

**Sheralyn Campbell** is an educator and fellow with the University of Melbourne. Most recently she has worked as manager of children's services for a small rural Australian local government organization. She has worked for 40 years in a range of Australian children's services and completed her doctoral studies with the University of Melbourne's Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood. Her research and practice have focused on creating changes to how equity and diversity are experienced in early childhood education and care settings.

## Contributors

**Marcela Montserrat Fonseca Bustos** was born in Chile and grew up in Norway. She graduated as an early childhood teacher in 1999 and she completed a Master's degree in early childhood education in 2007. Her Master's thesis is on heteronormativity in early childhood policies and institutions in Norway, and her thesis was amongst the first to address this issue in Norway. She is currently doing a Ph.D. and working as Assistant Professor at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences in Oslo/Norway.

**Margaret M. Coady** is an Honorary Research Fellow at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. She has a long history of research including being a successful applicant for the Australian Research Council funded Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics. She has held Research Fellowships at the Center for Human Values at Princeton University, the Rockefeller Center at Bellagio, Italy, the Kennedy Institute for Ethics at Georgetown University, and the Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics at Oxford University. Her research areas are professional ethics, children's rights and educational theory. She has supervised several Ph.D. and Masters students whose work included children's rights, professional ethics and the history of early childhood institutions.

**Bronwyn Davies** is an independent scholar based in Sydney and a professorial fellow at the University of Melbourne. She is a writer, scholar and teacher and has been a visiting professor in the last few years in the US, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Finland and the UK. She is well known for her work on gender, literacy and pedagogy, and for her critique of neoliberalism. In 2014 she published *Listening to Children* with Routledge, and her first work of fiction for children, a rewrite of the classic Australian story *The Fairy who Wouldn't Fly*. More details of her work can be found on her website at [bronwyndavies.com.au](http://bronwyndavies.com.au).

**Sonya L. Gaches** was a classroom teacher for over 25 years, as a teacher of toddlers, first graders and as developer of, and teacher in, a first through third grade multiage program. She is currently Assistant Professor of Practice in Early Childhood Education at the University of Arizona, teaching undergraduate courses in child guidance, child development, using data to guide instruction, and professional reflection and leadership and graduate courses in early childhood foundations, child development through post-structural and sociocultural lenses, and children's rights. Her research interests include children's rights, transformational professional development, and issues of power in classroom experiences.

**Audrey D'Souza Juma** is director at Notre Dame Institute of Education. Her doctorate is in the area of early childhood and gender. She has worked as a faculty member and coordinator of early childhood programs at the Institute for Educational Development—the Aga Khan University. She has also been a member of the advisory committee for the review of the Pakistan National Curriculum for early childhood. She has extensive teaching and teacher education experience in varied settings in Pakistan and Australia. Her research interests include gender, play, early childhood curriculum and pedagogy, ethnic diversity and identities.

**Sue Lopez-Atkinson** is an Aboriginal Victorian, a proud Yorta Yorta woman who has worked across the education sector from kindergarten to higher education with Indigenous and non-Indigenous students for 40 years. In 1998 she completed her Master's degree in Women's Studies partially by researching 'Indigenous

*Identities: Indigenous women and the urban experience, Melbourne, 1997*. This research which demonstrated the complexity, multiplicity and uniformity that unpins the dynamic of Indigenous culture inspired her to apply these understandings to further research into early childhood spaces. Subsequently she gained her Ph.D. in 2009 by research into 'Indigenous self-determination and early childhood education and care in Victoria' with the strong support of her local Aboriginal early childhood community. She is currently an Honorary Research Fellow at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. Sue has two adult children Anthony and Bianca and lives with her partner Dave and her two cats.

**Sri Marpinjun** is an individual consultant in early childhood education and equity. Since 1998, she has been working with families and early childhood educators in Yogyakarta, Indonesia to develop inclusive programs that embrace gender, ethnic, religious, and ability equity.

**Colette Murray** has more than 20 years' experience in the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector in both national and international contexts. She has worked as practitioner, trainer, lecturer, advocate and researcher. She has advocated for a comprehensive Diversity and Equality approach in ECCE practice, training and policy, introducing the Anti-Bias Approach to the Irish ECCE sector. She is the founder and coordinator of the Equality and Diversity Early Childhood National Network (EDeNn) and a founding member of the Diversity in Early Childhood Care, Education and Training (DECET) European Network. Colette currently lectures in the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown on the ECCE degree program. She writes and publishes widely on diversity and equality issues.

**Mercy Musomi** is the Executive Director of a children's rights organization in Kenya known as the Girl Child Network. The organization was started in 1995 to implement the recommendations of the fourth world conference on women held in Beijing in 1995. Mercy is an activist who fights for the rights of children and especially the Girl Child. The child in Kenya like in many African countries suffers violence from birth unto death. Girls suffer sexual gender based violence in terms of female genital mutilation; child marriages and child trafficking. Mercy is a Counselling Psychologist and undertakes a key role in mentoring children especially girls (early years, adolescents and the youth) on the importance of education despite the myriads of challenges they face. She is also a lobbyist and a champion of the rights of the child.

**Jayne Osgood** is Professor of Education at Middlesex University, UK and Visiting Professor at the Western Sydney University, Australia. She has authored numerous publications including books, peer-reviewed papers in *Gender & Education*, *Journal of Education Policy*, *Early Years*, and *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* (amongst others). She is currently on the editorial board of several high ranking journals including *British Education Research Journal*. She is also co-editor of *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology* and Associate

Editor of *Women's Studies International Forum*. Jayne is currently co-authoring a book entitled: *Feminists Researching Gendered Childhoods: generative entanglements* with Kerry H. Robinson as part of the Bloomsbury *Feminist Thought in Childhood Research Series*.

**Michelle Salazar Pérez** is Assistant Professor of Early Childhood at New Mexico State University in the United States. She uses marginalized feminist perspectives and critical qualitative methodologies to challenge contemporary performances of neoliberalism within dominant constructions of childhood and public policy. Her work has been published in a number of edited books and journals including *Multicultural Perspectives*, *Cultural Studies* <=> *Critical Methodologies*, and *Qualitative Inquiry*. She is co-editor of the books *Critical examinations of quality in childhood education and care: Regulation, disqualification, and erasure* (Peter Lang) and *Critical qualitative inquiry: Foundations and futures* (Left Coast Press/Routledge).

**Patricia G. Ramsey** is Professor Emerita of Psychology and Education at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, USA. She is a former preschool and kindergarten teacher and author of several books on early childhood multicultural education, including *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse World: Multicultural Education for Young Children*, now in its fourth edition.

**Kerry H. Robinson** is Professor of Sociology in the School of Social Sciences and Psychology at the Western Sydney University (WSU). Her research interests include: diversity and difference, gender and sexuality, gender and sexuality diversity, sexual and gender harassment/violence, constructions of childhood and sexuality, sexuality education, and transformative pedagogies. She has published widely in her research areas, including her recent book, *Innocence, Knowledge and the Construction of Childhood: The contradictory relationship between sexuality and censorship in children's contemporary lives* (2013, Routledge, London); and a co-authored book, *Diversity and Difference in Early Childhood Education: Issues for Theory and Practice* with Criss Jones Diaz (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006, Open University Press), of which a second edition will be published by Open University Press in 2015. Kerry is currently co-authoring a book entitled: *Feminists Researching Gendered Childhoods: generative entanglements* with Jayne Osgood as part of the Bloomsbury *Feminist Thought in Childhood Research Series*.

**Rebecca Simpson-Dal Santo** has worked in Australian early childhood education and care settings (0–5 years) since 2002. She recently completed her Master of Education (Research) examining how the governmental reforms of early childhood education have positioned early childhood educators as accountable for documenting children's identities and the ethical and political implications of this.

**Beth Blue Swadener** is Professor of Justice and Social Inquiry and Associate Director of the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on internationally comparative social policy, with focus on sub-Saharan Africa, impacts of neoliberal policy on local communities, and

children's rights and voices. She has published 11 books, including *Children and Families "At Promise"*; *Does the Village Still Raise the Child?*; *Decolonizing Research in Cross-Cultural Context*, *Power and Voice in Research with Children*, *Children's Rights and Education* and *Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Care and Education: A Reader*. Beth is a co-founder of the Jirani Project, serving vulnerable children in Kenya ([www.jiraniproject.org](http://www.jiraniproject.org)) and Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education (RECE) ([www.receinternational.org](http://www.receinternational.org)) and is active in several social justice and child advocacy organizations.



# Abbreviations

CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CEDAW	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CoE—ACRWC	Committee of Experts on the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EFA	Education for All
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FPE	Free Primary Education Policy
GCN	Girl Child Network
IDG	Interdepartmental working group
KPSA	Koorie Preschool Assistants
KUSA	Kindergarten Union of South Australia
MACS	Multifunctional Aboriginal Children Service
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
NQRAP	National Quality Rating and Assessment Process
NQS	National Quality Standards
NVCO	National Voluntary Childcare Organisations

OMC	Office of the Minister for Children
TLDS	Transition Learning and Development Statement
UTC	University Teachers College
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Kylie Smith , Kate Alexander  and Sheralyn Campbell 

**Abstract** Feminism(s) in Early Childhood pays attention to the need for feminist discourses to examine how we educate young children and their families about gender and equality in everyday early childhood classrooms. This edited collection brings together international scholars from around the globe to examine how different feminist theories are being used in early childhood research, policy and pedagogy. The array of feminist discourses captured by the authors offer contextualised possibilities for disrupting dominant patriarchal beliefs and producing change. The authors address and challenge a range of gendered effects for children of how early childhood development, educational outcomes, access to resources and belonging to community are seen and assessed. In this way, the book contributes to the global effort to end gender-based inequalities and violence across local and global communities.

**Keywords** Gender · Early childhood · Feminism(s) · Equity

Feminism(s) across the world seek to engage with and change gender based relations of power at political, institutional and personal sites where the effects of gendered knowledge and practices are lived as inequities. These inequities can be globally seen in the levels of gender-based violence inside and outside of the home, the under-representation of women in government and senior executive positions, the continuing pay disparities in the work place and the lower literacy levels and educational participation rates for girls/women when compared with boys/men. Globally, societies are structured by embedded gendered assumptions that both

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divide and link public and private life. This is played out through institutions which structure our lives and act as gate-keepers of who is heard and what counts as ‘true’ and ‘correct’ knowledges and practices. In public life this can be seen in a myriad of material ways including who are the key leaders in government and business; how policy is formed and resourced and by whom; which research and programs are prioritised and funded; and which knowledges are authorised. However, there are also innumerable and less obvious ways that institutions constitute gendered effects across the public and private spaces of daily life. As former Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard identified in *My Story* (Gillard 2014):

In contemporary Australia, despite so much progress being made, both women and men continue to be trapped in gender prisons. As Australia’s first female prime minister, I came to see the outlines of the bars of mine. But of all the experiences I had as prime minister, gender is the hardest to explain, to catch, to quantify. If you point to specific examples, they sound trivial (p. 98).

Education plays an important role in how community membership is constituted now and in the future, yet education is dominated by edu-capitalism and neoliberal education policies with their investment in a gender-neutral individual who can be measured and managed. This book acknowledges over thirty years of research evidence that children as young as three years of age can develop clear views of what it means to be a girl/woman or boy/man. At times, these constructions draw on narrow, stereotypical understandings of femininity and masculinity that lie at the heart of some of today’s gender based inequities. This book argues that gender discussion matters in the early childhood space within research and pedagogical practices because it goes to the heart of how power works through meanings of gender to constitute material differences for educators, children and families. A central criticism of early childhood theory has been its origins in white, male, patriarchal experience and knowledge. While there has been over thirty years of important research in gender in the early childhood space, this collection of work is unique as it brings together diverse feminist theories and perspectives that bring to the fore explorations of gender and feminist discourses such as feminist new materialist methodologies where human and more-than-human explorations of gender, identity, power, knowledge and truth are (re)imagined.

This book draws on feminist writers using history, institutions and pedagogical practices as mechanisms for addressing the practical implications of how knowledge and theory are produced and authorised, and by whom (Weedon 1997). In this way feminism(s) offer an opportunity for reconceptualising knowledge, and thus research and practice, not as a binary but rather intrinsically woven together and able to produce effects for political feminist action in many spaces and across many countries and continents. In particular, the feminism(s) in this book invite us to review and reconceptualise how knowledge is experienced as institutional, embodied and material, considering practices like early childhood policy and funding, educational resources and teaching strategies, research methods and theories, media images, health-care, family safety and services, and so on.