Book Review

Re-Situating Canadian Early Childhood Education

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Larry Prochner, editors
New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014

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I was thrilled to be offered the opportunity to review *Re-Situating Canadian Early Childhood Education*, edited by Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Larry Prochner. I was familiar with the work of many of the authors and the topic of reconceptualist early childhood education (ECE), particularly in Canada, is of great personal interest. However, my own positioning as a reader in Québec interfered with my ability to fully appreciate the book.

The book begins with a foreword by Daphney Curry and Gaile Cannella, followed by an introduction by the editors, and nine chapters by Canadian early childhood researchers. The anthology concludes with a chapter by Beth Blue Swadener, Lacey Peters, and Sonya Gaches. I mention the U.S. authors by name because the unfortunately misleading title, as well as the preface, introduction, and conclusion, had a negative impact on my perception of the work as a whole.

The foreword, introduction, and concluding chapters are excellent examples of reconceptualist ECE scholarly work. The reconceptualist movement in ECE has, over the course of the last three decades, used critical, poststructural, postmodern, postcolonial, feminist, and post-humanist theories to uncover and challenge social inequity and injustices within ECE, politicizing the field and troubling dominant narratives. Unfortunately, these three chapters don't seem to belong in a book with the word *Canadian* in the title. The foreword, by two U.S. researchers, presents the field of reconceptualist or critical ECE studies, suggesting that "multiple universalisms . . . should be called into question" (p. xi) and that social power relations be unmasked. However, in tracing a history of this movement, these authors appear not to recognize their own U.S.-centric perspective. While they cite some authors from other English-speaking countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, the tone of the chapter assumes that all readers either live in the United States or are familiar with that country's ECE practices, or lack thereof, making the call to de-centre traditionally marginalized knowledges appear hypocritical. The introduction, by the editors of the anthology (two prominent Canadian researchers), offers a similar history of the reconceptualist movement from a U.S. perspective, although these authors cite work from Sweden, as well. The history of the reconceptualist movement in Canada is mentioned briefly in a footnote, where readers are directed to a previous chapter by Pacini-Ketchabaw and Pence (2005).

Ironically, it is only in the concluding chapter, in the section on cross-national perspectives that a brief overview of Canadian reconceptualist ECE scholarly work beyond the current

volume is provided. The final chapter, by three U.S. researchers, is actually a brilliant piece that questions children's rights in research and policy-making and provides inspiring examples from Australia, Northern Ireland, Canada, and the United States. The difficulty that I experienced as I read this chapter, is that within a book on Canadian ECE, the United States appears as the norm, and the other countries are presented as the *other*. I found this format particularly ironic in a book dedicated to uncovering marginalized knowledges and de-centering mainstream adult perspectives on Canadian ECE.

Ignoring the title and supposed aim of the anthology, the nine chapters written by Canadian authors are indeed quite wonderful examples of current reconceptualist work being done in Canada. Some of the chapters read like the continuation of a conversation between the authors and the audience, allowing the readers to take up where the last article, chapter, presentation, or publication left off, and to follow along as the authors continue to question some aspect of ECE practice. For example, Sherry Rose and Pam Whitty's chapter, *Valuing Subjective Complexities: Disrupting the Tyranny of Time*, picked up where their 2010 article on educator's use of time in childcare centres (Rose & Whitty, 2010) left off, turning their focus on this occasion to time use in professional learning situations.

Similarly, Judith Bernhard's chapter, *Immigrant Parents Taking Part in Their Children's Education: A Practical Experiment*, summarizes a decade's worth of work, providing new analysis and a reflective look at what that research achieved, what could have been improved, and where her research team hopes to go next. I enjoyed following along as Kummen and her colleagues applied post-humanist theory to data previously analysed in another article (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kummen, & Thompson, 2010) in their chapter, *Making Developmental Knowledge Stutter and Stumble*. This essay inspired me to rethink the role of objects and more-than-humans (i.e., plants and animals) in my own research. The chapters by Luigi Iannacci and Bente Graham, Rachel Langford, and Anna Kirova are similar in that I had read their previous work and/or heard them present their research, and was both impressed and stimulated by their continued engagement with their research questions.

Mary Caroline Rowan's chapter, *Resituating Practice Through Teachers' Storying of Children's Interests*, unequivocally and unapologetically centres Nunavik and the Inuttitut language. She provides two contrasting learning stories and a critical reflection on importing southern ECE practice and materials to northern communities. While the chapter is drawn from her master's thesis research (Rowan, 2011), Rowan uses decolonial theory, recognizing and contesting the imbalance of power between colonizers and currently or previously colonized peoples to understand a specific ECE context.

I had not come across Katherine Davidson's work before, but was very impressed with her chapter, *The Integration of Cognitive and Sociocultural Theories of Literacy Development for Instruction and Research*, nicely integrating cognitive and socio-constructivist theories of literacy development. In fact, I have since used this chapter with the students who I teach in ECE certificate programs. I find it a concrete and simple way to introduce the idea that cognitive and sequential approaches are not the only way to approach young children's development.

I was somewhat disappointed with Zeenat Janmohamed's chapter, *When Queer Enters Early Childhood Teacher Training: So What's Inappropriate About That?*, on the heteronormative discourse of developmentally appropriate practice. Janmohamed focuses only on queer parents, inadvertently presenting future educators as all straight and misses an opportunity to reflect on young children who identify as transgender or are questioning their gender identity. I also found that this chapter, similar to a few others, seemed to assume that all

readers would be familiar with the organization of ECE in Ontario, which brings me back to my major critique of the book.

I have to admit that, with a title like *Re-situating Canadian Early Childhood Education*, I expected the anthology as a whole, or at least the introductory chapters, to situate Canadian ECE either in a global context or to present more thoroughly the diversity of the Canadian ECE landscape. From my own perspective as a PhD candidate in Québec, I found the complete lack of mention of Québec's publically funded and regulated childcare system surprising. The fact that provinces such as British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick draw upon reconceptualist theory in their ECE curriculum frameworks was also notably absent (other than in Rose and Whitty's chapter). I then noticed that five of the nine chapters focus on research carried out in Ontario. Beyond the failure to de-centre the United States as the point of reference for reconceptualist ECE foundations, pedagogies, curricula, and practices, the book also privileges Ontario above all other provinces and territories. An introductory chapter would have better set the stage for the chapters about reconceptualist projects across Canada if it presented the different systems in the different provinces, as well as the provinces currently struggling toward a public childcare system, the different ministries responsible for ECE in the different provinces (education, family, etc.), and perhaps included an overview of curricular frameworks and educational employment conditions.

The book was published in the United States and comes across as being intended for a U.S. audience, so I contacted one of the authors to find out about the origin of the title. It turns out that the publisher required the use of the word *Canadian* in the title. Had the book been titled *Reconceptualist Research in Early Childhood from Canada*, or something similar, I would not have expected the book to provide an overview of Canadian reconceptualist ECE research and practice, and would have been better able to appreciate the book as a whole.

My recommendation to Canadian readers is to ignore the title and separate the foreword, introduction, and conclusion from the nine chapters with Canadian content. The book will be of interest to Canadian ECE researchers, graduate students, administrators, educators, and primary school teachers. Finally, legislators who enjoy grappling with theoretical constructs and who are open to the idea of challenging the status quo in ECE are also likely to find the anthology compelling.

References

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