

Editors' Introduction: Engaging ECE in times of chaos and authoritarianism

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Early childhood educators have been working in increasingly precarious conditions for some time. Sadly, the precarity is likely to persist for a long time. Early childhood programs have been impacted by the Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM) for decades. Dominant discourses of policy and practice perpetuate neoliberal ideologies and narrowly conceived interpretations of quality, reducing the care and education of young children to a merely instrumental endeavor that can be efficiently produced and consumed via crude marketplace transactions. Looming environmental catastrophe, growing economic disparities, and political polarization characterize dire conditions that urgently demand critical interrogations of the status quo, inspiring generative alternatives to the GERM that plagues ECE.

Uprisings of authoritarian regimes around the globe further compound the challenge of finding and enacting antidotes to authoritarian pressure. Authoritarian leaders pose existential threats to the future of open societies and a chaotic context for the education and care of young children. Elsewhere, we have considered the consequences of these perilous conditions as the unfortunate and unavoidable backdrop for early childhood research, policy, and practice (Michael Luna & Castner, 2025; Michael Luna & Castner, 2023). The way forward for more sustainable, equitable, peaceful, and liberating early childhood research, advocacy, and pedagogy is far from

obvious. Nonetheless, amid the chaos of ominous socio-political conditions and overt expressions of authoritarian force, the education and care of young children must proceed undeterred, even in the face of an uncertain and seemingly bleak future.

This special issue of *Global Educational Review* offers four scholarly contributions that answer this call. The articles represent perspectives from England, Poland, and the United States. The authors boldly challenge the status quo perpetuated by dominant discourses of ECE and refuse to be subdued by authoritarian pressures. In Timothy Snyder's (2017) short book, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, the first two lessons are: 1) do not obey in advance, and 2) defend institutions. The contributors to this special issue demonstrate the applicability of these lessons in early childhood research, policy, and practice. Amid the growing power of aspiring autocrats, the institution of early childhood care and education must be protected by those directly invested in caring for and educating young children. Because capitulating to the implicit authoritarianism circulating through dominant discourse only teaches demagogues how they can impose power in a more overtly authoritarian regime, the advancement of critical perspectives in ECE is as vital as ever.

This special issue of *Global Education Review* brings together critical perspectives

from both sides of the Atlantic, highlighting the complexities of research, policy, and practice. The first article sheds light upon mandates in New York City for the adoption of *the Creative Curriculum* and *Teaching Strategies GOLD*. Lacey Peters, Mark Nagasawa, Maria Mavrides Calderon, Abigail Kerlin, Helen Frazier, Beth Ferholt, Erica Clarke Yardy, Marjorie Brickley, and Alisa Algava collaboratively interrogate how neoliberal forces diminish the quality of early education and consider possibilities for organizing and coalition-building. Then, in the second article, Nathan Archer explores how early childhood educators in England are finding ways to disrupt and resist authoritarian demands. Archer's conception of borderland narratives reveals a generative space for realizing the personal and professional subjectivities of early childhood teachers. Lilly Padia, Luisiana Melendez, and Sandra Osorio critically analyze the authoritarian power that privileges monolingualism. Their research, examining a Reggio-inspired preschool in Chicago, provides helpful guidance on how multilingual identities can be collaboratively affirmed and sustained in early childhood settings. Lastly, Joanna Leek and Elzbieta Szulewicz conclude this special issue by exploring international educational programs in Poland. Their research suggests that constructivist practices, which invite open-ended inquiry and nurture children's agency, are a meaningful way to counteract centralized curricular control.

Much has happened since these articles were written. Concerns about autocracy have intensified in the United States and around the world as stakeholders in early childhood education seek to navigate a rapidly changing world. Nonetheless, the issues addressed in this collection speak to ways power is exercised in pernicious ways that threaten harm to young

children, teachers, and families. According to Glasius (2023), market forces, constraints on early childhood educators' professional agency, attacks on the assets of cultural and linguistic pluralism, and nationalist ideologies are authoritarian practices when they exhibit "a pattern of actions, embedded in an organized context, sabotaging accountability to people over who a configuration of actors exerts a degree of control, or their representatives, by disabling their voice and disabling their access to information" (Glasius, 2023, p.22). Put differently, in open societies, it is imperative to insist the onus is on those exercising power to justify how and why their power is being exercised in the way that it is. The four articles in this special issue activate information about early childhood policy and practice in ways that validate the voices of teachers, children, and families. Amidst the contemporary culture wars shaping the social, cultural, and political landscape of much of the world, those who care about the education of young children face similar threats. May the anti-authoritarian impulses of these articles inspire solidarity within the field of early childhood education.

References

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