

Editor's Introduction: Continuing a conversation about ECE amid authoritarian chaos

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This is the second special issue of *Global Education Review* dedicated to the impact of authoritarianism as it pertains to the education of young children. This issue comprises three articles, which continue a conversation initiated by the authors of the previous special issue (Archer, 2025; Leek & Szulewicz, 2005; Padia et al., 2025; Peters et al., 2025). Collectively, the scholars who have contributed to these two special issues demonstrate the resilience of hope sustained within early childhood theory, research, and practice. The intellectual vibrance of the ECE field is indeed heartening amid the perilous socio-political conditions currently contextualizing the care and education of young children.

My concerns about the impact of authoritarianism on education stem from my own experiences, both as a former public school kindergarten teacher and currently as a professor of early childhood education and curriculum studies in the Midwestern United States. Admittedly, I have been distrustful of the impositions of top-down authority throughout my career in early childhood education. However, in my view, the mere existence of authority figures, hierarchical structures, or authoritative mandates should not be conflated with authoritarianism. Concerns that threats and manifestations of authoritarianism are festering in the United States and around the globe are nonetheless warranted when power is exercised in ways that enable authority figures to circumvent accountability to the individuals and groups subjected to their authority. Authoritarian practices, according to Marlies

Glasius (2018), are “patterns of action that sabotage accountability to people over whom a political actor exerts control, or their representatives, by means of secrecy, disinformation, and disabling voice” (p. 517). Elsewhere, I have focused on curriculum as an element of education that has been subjected to generations of authoritarian practices in the United States (Castner, Schneider, & Henderson, 2025). While authoritarianism is generally a persistent and pervasive issue for curriculum practice in the United States, it is particularly a salient concern for various aspects of early education and care practices worldwide.

This collection of papers contributes three distinct perspectives on the problems of authoritarianism facing ECE. First, Åse Løfblad, Odd Rune Stalheim, and Kari Lerbak decry the dominance of neoliberalism and new public management as an anchor of authoritarian trends. Through their students' letter writing, they uncover the anti-authoritarian potential of resonance and subjectivity that is already tacitly “moving in the shadows.” Second, Maria Mavrides Calderon and Maria Dolores Lasso direct our attention to early childhood care and education in Ecuador. They examine government and media documents, as well as social media posts, to shed critical light upon inconsistencies between political rhetoric and the realities of implementation. Lastly, Sara Michael Luna critically examines the varied conceptions of families reinforced by state-level social studies standards. She warns that authoritarian movements are supported when neoliberal managerial logics and nationalist

ideologies are circulated as “official knowledge,” and she calls for the preservation of early childhood curriculum as a “contested space” where critical inquiry and open discourse welcome pluralistic ways of being and knowing about families.

This collection offers three powerful and insightful responses to the authoritarian conditions currently beleaguering early childhood care and education. Infringements of individual autonomy and dignity (i.e., illiberal practices) often overlap with the accountability sabotage of authoritarian practices (Glasius, 2018). These three articles expose ways in which human rights and democratic ways of life are threatened in early childhood settings. Further, they offer alternative visions for early childhood education as an inclusive space for liberating students’ voices and demanding equity. Although early childhood educators will likely continue to make sense of and deal with authoritarian conditions for some time to come, these three articles contribute to a critical conversation that I hope readers will continue.

References

- Castner, D.J., Schneider, J.L., & Henderson, J.G. (2025). *Anti-authoritarian curriculum practice: Powerful theories for teachers*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Glasius, M. (2018). What authoritarianism is ... and is not : a practice perspective. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 94(3), 515–533.