



Cannella, G. S., Pérez, M. S. & Lee, I. F. (Eds.). (2016). *Critical examinations of quality in early education and care: Regulation, disqualification, and erasure*. New York: Peter Lang.

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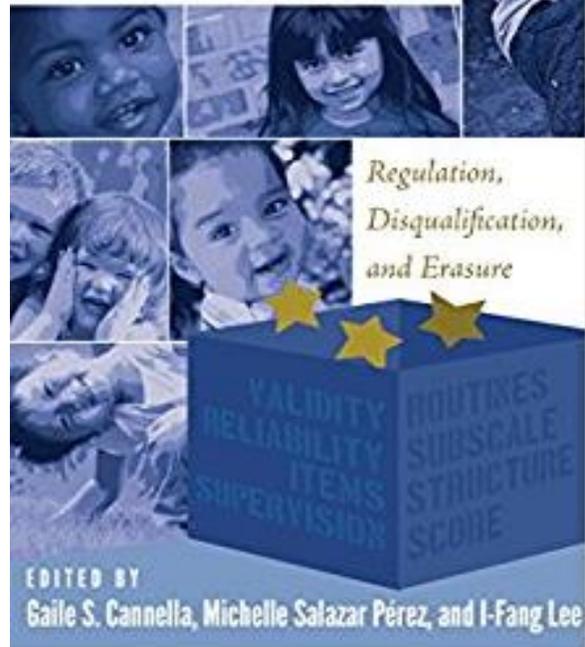
**Reviewed by Melia E. Repko-Erwin
University of Colorado Boulder
United States**

The concept and language of quality cannot accommodate issues such as diversity and multiple perspectives, contextual specificity and subjectivity. To do that we must go beyond...

(Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 6)

So reads the epigraph to Cannella, Salazar Pérez, and Lee's (2016) *Critical Examinations in Early Education and Care: Regulation, Disqualification, and Erasure*, an edited collection of theoretical and empirical work by early childhood scholars situated across the globe. "The notion of quality," writes Cannella, "(and its related neoliberal constructs like accountability, evidence, efficiency, and human capital) continue to invade, co-opt, and travel the globe, especially related to care, education, and services for those who are young" (p. 1). This two-part edited collection attends to the forms and problems of domination within current conceptions of quality in early childhood care and education (e.g., defining and measuring components of ECCE "quality" according to a Eurocentric standard), while also drawing on diverse theoretical

Critical Examinations of Quality in Early Education and Care



perspectives to offer alternative, and more expansive, possibilities.

Critical Examinations addresses the call by Dahlberg et al. (1999) to “go beyond” the concept and language of “quality” to better understand how power dynamics and privileged forms of knowledge come to influence ECCE guidelines, curriculum, policy, and practice. The authors problematize and expand upon the idea of ECCE quality by posing questions like: *How is quality defined, supported, assessed, and regulated in current ECCE policies and practices?; Who/what is included within conceptions of ECCE quality, and who/what is overlooked?; and What possibilities lie beyond present/ dominant understandings of quality?* For scholars of early childhood education interested in critical, post-structural, and affective perspectives (among others), Cannella et al.’s collection invites generative conversations and future explorations of possible paths beyond the call for quality and regulation that dominates much of the present ECCE discourse.

In the first half of the book, the contributing authors critically analyze historical and recent ECCE policy documents in the United States and Aotearoa/New Zealand.¹ The authors live and situate their work in the US and New Zealand—two countries with deep histories of colonialism and imperialism, with enduring efforts by those in power to preclude indigenous people and other marginalized groups from participating in national and local policy-making decisions. Both countries have been influential in shaping education policy and practice beyond their borders. As Salazar Pérez and Cahill note, “Without a doubt, the United States has been instrumental in propagating universal conceptualizations of quality both locally and around the world” (p. 11).

All four chapters in Part I examine how discussions of “quality” support hegemonic views about the purpose and role of ECCE. Salazar Pérez and Cahill begin by examining the rhetoric of “readiness” within the larger call for quality in ECCE. They rightfully note that the prominence placed upon *readiness* and *quality* in early childhood education are most often couched in a market-based neoliberal concern for children’s future economic profitability (and parents’ rights to ensure that future is bright). By analyzing U.S. federal policies and initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (2002) and Race to the Top (2009) and systems designed to measure and hold ECCE providers accountable (e.g., the Quality Rating and Improvement System [QRIS]), Salazar Pérez and Cahill point out how neoliberal policies that have impacted elementary and secondary schools are now directed at early childhood programs serving young children and their families. Contributor Lisa Miller extends Salazar Pérez and Cahill’s argument, contending that the rhetoric of readiness in the United States is “based upon what a typical child of white, middle-class parents is able to do at a particular age” (p. 36). As such, conceptions of school readiness within quality frameworks work to “Other” children who do not conform to “typical” expectations. Drawing on the social theories of Michel Foucault and others, Miller ties the neoliberal framing of ECCE quality to power, regulation, and the institutional privileging of some bodies/ways of knowing over others.

In addition to exploring the notion of ECCE quality as a market good to be consumed for future profit, other chapters focus on the colonialist/imperialist project on Māori culture and language in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Drawing on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, Ritchie argues that the kind of culturally- and linguistically-sustaining learning opportunities and experiences promoted by *Te Whāriki*—the national ECCE

¹ Aotearoa is the Māori name for the country of New Zealand.

curriculum developed in Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1996 aimed at promoting and preserving the Māori language and culture—are rendered impossible within the capitalistic economy surrounding (and managing) its implementation. For example, Richie notes that in an increasingly privatized system of ECCE in New Zealand, many government supports needed to better prepare and enable teachers to achieve the aims of *Te Whāriki* have been removed. Because language is “a tool of governance” (p. 41), *Te Whāriki*’s purported intention may be to preserve and promote the Māori language and culture, but actually achieving this goal is not in the government’s best interest. Because of New Zealand’s long history of erasure of Māori language(s) and culture through mainstream colonial schooling (e.g., linguafaction), reversing the effects of this history will require the (unlikely) realization by those in power that they must not only relinquish their control, but also financially support Māori peoples in their quest for liberation.

Because recent attempts to define and ensure quality within ECCE are informed by neoliberalism and its associated terminology consisting of “certainty, predictability, and accountability” (p. 88), most ECCE policies and practices in their current form will never address issues of social justice. According to Osgood and Scarlett, “The embodied encounters of quality in early-years contexts are shaped by wonder, serendipity, and unpredictability, yet the metanarratives framing the field act to contain and regulate with serious implications for social justice” (p. 153). As such, while the first part of *Critical Examinations* problematizes the notion of quality in early childhood care and education, the second part imagines more expansive possibilities for what culturally- and linguistically-responsive ECCE programs could actually entail. Recognizing that “quality” is inherently subjective and value-laden, Urban persuades his readers to give up on the pursuit of a universally agreed-upon

definition of quality; instead, he suggests that we adopt Freire’s (2004) notion of “untested feasibility,” thereby embracing uncertainty and openness as we work *with* rather than *against* diverse perspectives in ECCE.

One example of a framework for ECCE quality that embraces “untested feasibility” can be found in Colombia’s national ECCE initiative, *De Cero a Siempre* (“From Zero to Forever”), which aims to provide a holistic approach to early childhood development, emphasizing “health and well-being, education, social cohesion, and equality” (p. 100). A chief goal of *De Cero a Siempre* has been to invest in and expand ECCE across Colombia, in addition to coordinating ECCE providers to make these services more accessible to more children, especially those from vulnerable populations (OECD, 2016). As Urban argues, and I would agree, rather than operating as if a universally agreed upon conception of early childhood care and education is possible or desirable, Colombia’s national ECCE policy recognizes the rich diversity of experiences and opportunities inherent in caring for and educating young children, and is working to support a range of ECCE experiences that honor these differences.

Other contributors to *Critical Examinations* take up post-structural, post-human, feminist and indigenous perspectives in their efforts to “go beyond” quality across a variety of geopolitical contexts. Acknowledging the danger in subscribing to “a global neoliberal imaginary” (p. 118), I-Fang Lee questions the scientific claim of objectivity within attempts to define and measure quality in ECCE in Hong Kong and Australia. Observing the “tightening” of what qualifies as quality in Norwegian ECCE, Otterstad et al. take up post-humanist perspectives as they consider how conceptions of quality not only circulate in the larger policy conversations, but also come to be viewed as commonsense truths. The reader is urged to “move away from quality as a matter of fact” toward

“quality as a matter of concern” (p. 126), or as “intra-active becoming” (p. 128). Jayne Osgood and Ruby Red Scarlett also engage with the idea of becomings; drawing on Butler (1993) and feminist new material perspectives, Osgood and Scarlett recognize that exploring the possibilities that lie beyond quality does not mean letting “go of what we thought we knew,” but rather, generates new ways of understanding quality and all it entails.

For those who may find the latter half of the book too abstract or theoretical, Mary Caroline Rowan’s contribution—arguably more accessible than the three chapters that proceed it—provides the persevering reader with a satisfying conclusion. Drawing on ideas of the local and specific, Rowan examines Inuit ways of knowing and being that might inform conceptualizations of early childhood education in the Canadian Arctic. While other contributors emphasize the nonhuman characteristics of quality (and the corresponding documents that bring quality to life), Rowan recognizes that “documents cannot act alone” (p. 173). Informed by Ahmed’s (2006) conception of “nonperformance”, Rowan argues that in order for First Nations and Inuit perspectives to fully inform early childhood education in the Canadian Arctic, these perspectives must actually be heard and incorporated into existing policies. For example, Rowan describes how Canadian ECCE health code policies prevent Inuit and First Nations’ childcare providers from serving locally caught and prepared fish. Even though serving this fish would affirm Inuit children’s cultural backgrounds and beliefs, not to mention show respect for their dietary practices, childcare providers must attend to nationally-approved conceptions of “quality” if they wish to maintain their licenses and certification. In this case (and many others), the colonialist perspectives and neoliberal ideology informing the “developed” world’s understandings of ECCE quality interfere with and erase indigenous ways of knowing and being.

As a collection of critical examinations of ECCE quality, Cannella, Salazar, and Lee’s edited volume provides the reader with a strong geopolitical and economic context for understanding the ECCE quality debate in the global West. As the authors within this collection effectively argue, the neoliberal ideology informing most Western ECCE education policies for the last several decades cannot be separated from the regulations put in place to ensure/enforce their implementation. Policies that privilege whiteness, linear learning outcomes, and an unquestioned uptake of developmentally appropriate practice reify notions of “typical” and “universal” childhood— notions that simply do not (and cannot) exist. Perspectives that diverge from such “normed” ways of thinking are most often discounted as “abnormal” and dismissed from the conversation.

The authors of this edited volume offer theoretical and analytic tools for readers who wish to engage in the broader conversation challenging neoliberal efforts to standardize not only ECCE experiences, but the broader field of K-12 education. While the second half of the book would benefit from a deeper engagement with the theoretical underpinnings informing its arguments (i.e., those unfamiliar with these theories would likely need to supplement the text with additional reading), the reader nonetheless is equipped with a variety of “jumping off points” to continue their own exploration, such as the utility of post-human theories when considering the impact of education policies. As a whole, this text provides scholars in the fields of early childhood research, critical policy analysis, and ethnic studies, as well as those interested in critical, feminist, and queer theories in education, with a solid resource to sharpen their understandings and strengthen their critiques of taken-for-granted “truths” dominating early childhood care and education.

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About the Reviewer

Melia E. Repko-Erwin is a doctoral candidate in Curriculum & Instruction, Literacy Studies and Research on Teaching and Teacher Education (ROTATE) at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her research interests center on early literacy instruction, literacy policy, and teacher education. Prior to pursuing her doctorate, Melia spent twelve years working as a teacher and literacy instructional coach in K-8 schools in Arizona, Washington, DC, and Colorado.



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