

Book Review / Compte rendu

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International Perspectives on the History of Early Childhood Education by Dagmar Kasüschke, Diana Franke-Meyer, & Rita Braches-Chyrek (Eds.). Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2025, 174 pages, hardcover. ISBN 978-3-8474-3153-4

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada's reliance on early childhood education (ECE¹) came into desperate focus. What we saw were families grappling with the challenges of caring for their children in their own homes while simultaneously accommodating their own forty-hour (or more) work weeks. Our own Canadian history of ECE left us starkly facing the disjoint between our idealized family unit and the demand of a capitalist economy.

In Kasüschke, Franke-Meyer, and Braches-Chyrek's (eds.) new volume in the *History of Early Childhood Education* series, the team has turned their critical gaze toward international perspectives on the early childhood education profession. The series this volume belongs to takes ECE in Germany as its starting point. Here, the overarching goal of the new work, a collection of eleven chapters, is to extend the central conversation past the German borders to consider how *other* countries have responded to early childhood education and care. Said differently this is a work that asks: how do ECE responses in countries such as Austria, the United States or Italy, complexify and res-

pond to our understanding of the history of ECE in Germany?

This work is necessarily a conversation between the eleven featured chapters and the history of ECE in Germany, though the editors do not make this explicit throughout. What *is* explicit is the focus that each chapter brings to one of the central questions ECE asks of all countries: who will care for our children? At its core each chapter traces how a country - Hungary, Australia, or Turkey, for example - has wrangled with ideas of family, motherhood, and child-rearing against the pressures and necessities of formal childcare. Each chapter complexified our understanding of the family/childcare tension that has propelled their response to the ECE field. In doing so, the countries featured juxtapose, confirm or extend the history of childcare in Germany and how the understanding of family and motherhood shaped their response.

It is useful to pause and consider how one chapter accomplishes this central aim, dwelling in the particulars of one country's response, in order to highlight how this book functions overall. In a chapter by Katharina Röser entitled *Historical aspects of the Austrian kindergarten to consider the current field of tension between upbringing, education, care and institutionalization*, we are walked through the Austrian response to childcare. "The first childcare facility was founded in 1828 by Countess Theresia

1 The term *early childhood education* (ECE) will be used throughout this document to signify all care programs delivered for children ages birth to eight that operate outside the public school system.

Brunswick-Korompa in Ofen (Budapest). [...] The focus of the institution is on welfare and charity [... The target group of these institutions were children of workers, whose parents worked outside the home from morning to evening” (p. 30). Here Röser underscores that this early opening of formal childcare sites operated under the auspices of *charitable* work, meaning those children whose parents worked (and would, thus, require care) were seen to be somehow “poor” or “deficient”. The children do not suffer from lack of resources per se, they suffer from lack of parents, and specifically mothers. As childcare is considered a social good, provided charitably (and, later, by the state) to act as a pseudo surrogate-parent. If we consider the historical context of an ECE response in Hungary, we can hold this example up to the previous German example, and arrive at the overall goal of this book: to underscore how international perspectives on the historical tensions around childcare versus parenting (or, oftentimes, motherhood) provide numerous connections to the persistent challenges faced by the ECE field in Germany. These challenges, arising from the history of ECE, are sadly not unique to Germany, or any of the countries featured in this work.

While this is a timely and welcome addition to the series, it will be of greatest interest to readers familiar with previous titles in the series or a keen interest in ECE in German contexts (it bears mentioning that Canada is not one of the international perspectives featured). As so many countries continue reenvisioning their ECE system it grows increasingly important to wrangle with the complex and nuanced history of this work. This book brings a novel discussion to the forefront of global ECE; as of yet very little has been written considering the history of this work. Aside from the plethora of texts written about Friedrich Froebel, the “father” of modern-day Kindergarten, individual country-specific histories that trace the emergence and arc of ECE are largely absent from the literature. Certainly, learning from the tangled histories of individual countries can inspire critical insight and inspiration in our own context, wherever that may be.

To close on a relevant Canadian parallel: the struggles facing the ECE sector in Canada are well known and well documented. Heartbrea-

kingly, since 2004, Canada has struggled to respond elegantly to the ECE field and its resounding calls for reform and reinvestment (OECD, 2018; UNICEF Office of Research, 2008, 2020). A report to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), commissioned by the Canadian government, previously outlined the four main challenges faced by the sector. The first of these is “To create a unified Canadian vision for childcare” (2018). For Canada to articulate a unified vision for our ECE field, an urgent message exists alongside Kasüschke, Franke-Meyer, and Braches-Chyrek’s latest work. Canadian ECE researchers and thinkers would do well to consider Canada’s historical perspective on ECE, and work to articulate a responsive vision from there.

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