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**Book review**

Book review: *Early Childhood in the Anglosphere: Systemic failings and transformative possibilities*, by Peter Moss and Linda Mitchell

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London: UCL Press, 2024, 260 pp.; ISBNs: 978-18000-8255-7 (hbk), 978-18000-8254-0 (pbk), 978-18000-8256-4 (ebk), 978-18000-8253-3 (pdf)

In *Early Childhood in the Anglosphere: Systemic failings and transformative possibilities*, Peter Moss and Linda Mitchell critique early childhood systems across the 'Anglosphere', encompassing seven high-income, predominantly Anglophone countries: Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, Aotearoa New Zealand, Scotland and the United States. Their comparative analysis reveals common systemic failings rooted in neoliberal ideologies. The book proposes a compelling transformation to fundamentally improve these systems, which have evolved erratically over decades as a consequence of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2016). GERM is characterised by principles of 'increased standardisation, a narrowing of the curriculum to focus on core subjects/knowledge, the growth of high-stakes accountability, and the use of corporate management practices' (Fuller and Stevenson, 2018: 1). The resultant 'terrors of performativity' (75) adversely affect children as young as three in early years

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as practitioners resort to questionable practices, such as ability grouping in England, and lead to teacher attrition due to pressures of 'hyper performativity' (Ball, 2003; Lambert and Gray, 2022; Roberts-Holmes, 2021). This book is therefore an essential read for policymakers, educators and scholars seeking to understand and improve early childhood education systems in the Anglosphere and beyond. It challenges readers to question how they conceptualise early childhood education, and imagine systems that are more 'equitable, integrated, and caring', an alternative narrative to the myth of 'neoliberalism's TINA ("there is no alternative")' (197).

This book is especially timely in England, following the Labour Party's decisive victory in the 2024 general election. Their focus on accessibility, quality and affordability, particularly their promise to extend childcare support from the 'end of parental leave to the end of primary school', highlights the urgency of Moss and Mitchell's vision for a well-funded early childhood education system as a public good, integrated with parental leave (Labour, 2024). It significantly contributes to current debates on early childhood education provision, funding and policy. Chapter 1, 'The Anglosphere in a time of crises', outlines the book's structure and defines key terms such as 'early childhood education systems' and 'neoliberalism', analysing shared systemic failings rooted in neoliberal ideologies. In this book, 'early childhood systems' encompass both early childhood education and care services, as well as parenting leave (including maternity, paternity and parental leave). Chapter 2, 'Early childhood systems in the Anglosphere: Seven national summaries', provides detailed overviews of early childhood systems in seven Anglosphere nations. Chapter 3, 'Similar features, similar failings', critically compares these countries, revealing commonalities. Chapter 4, 'The Anglosphere model: Looking for causes', discusses possible reasons for these failings, such as a 'childcare-dominated split' and marketisation. Chapter 5, 'Beyond the Anglosphere: Two different models', draws parallels and differences between France and Sweden's more successful approaches, encouraging a reconceptualisation of Anglosphere systems. Chapter 6, 'Trying for transformative change: England', examines England's failed transformation attempts, with historical context. Chapter 7, 'Aotearoa New Zealand', then compares these failings to New Zealand's relatively more effective reforms. Finally, Chapter 8, 'Transforming early childhood in the Anglosphere', proposes transformative possibilities, advocating for a publicly funded and integrated system that treats all families as equals. The book's structure is helpful, as each chapter builds on the previous one while also standing alone for those interested in specific contexts.

Critical of the ubiquitous discourse of childcare, Moss and Mitchell challenge the current decoupling of 'education' and 'care' within these systems. The authors call for us to stop the interchangeable use of 'early childhood care' and 'early childhood education'. While care is essential, its overuse has led to it replacing 'education' in early childhood education, now often referred to simply as 'early childhood care'. This distinction underscores the critical need to reconsider our assumptions and highlights the necessity for a paradigm shift that gives 'education' its due prominence. Care, Moss and Mitchell argue, should be reframed, as it currently has the undertone of a commodity catering only to the few who can afford it. Instead, they call for early childhood education for all, a public good whose provision is underpinned by an 'ethics of care' (1).

One of the book's strengths is its critical yet hopeful tone. The proposed transformation is grounded in a paradigm shift that calls for a break away from traditional thinking and that introduces the conceptualisation of a dynamic triangle of agency involving children, parents and early childhood educators. While viewing all parents as equal, it recognises children's unique opinions on education as valid, even those that diverge from and challenge the accepted norms. Such democratic adult-child dynamics are misaligned with standardised assessments driven by the neoliberal agenda. To facilitate this paradigmatic shift, the authors call for adequately skilled early childhood professionals to appreciate this reimagined view of children as agentic. Moss and Mitchell highlight the importance of an ethical framework for schools to ensure that they remain accountable to the communities that support them and the families they serve. Their proposed integrated, publicly funded early childhood system is hopeful and practical, offering clear, actionable recommendations.

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