

# Early Childhood Education and Materiality: Guest Editorial

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Materiality is a central aspect in young children's everyday lives as it manifests in both nature, animal and human interactions, institutional practices, policies and politics as well as aesthetic matters. This special issue is inspired by the *Childhood and Materiality Conference* held in Jyväskylä, in May, 2018, but it especially focuses on materiality ***in early childhood and early childhood education***.

The theme opens up to many different interpretations. According to one view, social constructivist approaches that emphasize language and culture as constituting social reality, have neglected material realities. In this sense, a renewed focus on materiality means that "attention is directed particularly to the artefact's nonsymbolic (i.e. material) meaning to human experience and action" (Løkken & Moser 2012 p. 304 referring to Dante, 2005). This stance on materiality moves social theory towards a realist ontology (Alanen, 2018).

Yet, materialities can also serve as (metaphorical) tools that direct our attention to different theoretical ideas. As was evident in the range of conference presentations heard in the 2018 conference, materialities are often evaluated on different social, aesthetic, economic and environmental scales. Within the area of early childhood, the questions of materiality also specifically relate to power relations between children and adults which leads to considerations of agency and intergenerational relations.

This special issue is a multidisciplinary collection of articles, with multiple methodologies and theoretical approaches that address materiality in diverse geographical, social, cultural and educational contexts. The papers within this issue represent educational, historical, and social scientific as well as post-colonial approaches and use different objects and materialism as both a concrete starting point from which to access people's experiences and as a lense through which it

is possible to shift our methodological stance when doing research. Theoretically they make use of approaches such as, for example, posthumanism and new-materialism.

*Alison Clark's* article re-examines material from empirical studies carried out within a participatory paradigm involving the Mosaic approach by using Deleuze and Quattari's (1987) ideas of smooth and striated spaces. In Clark's approach, the materiality of 'quilting' serves as a metaphor that describes the multiple factors that contribute to a research process. Furthermore, the article also highlights how materiality becomes an important feature of exploring how young children make sense of the world in which they are immersed in. *Maiju Paananen, Anu Kuukka and Maarit Alasuutari* also make use of Deleuze's and Quattari's ideas in their article. They focus especially on the concept of assemblage in order to explore the interconnectedness and materiality of the policies of early childhood education and care (ECEC). The Finnish case of entitlement to ECEC offers empirical insights in terms of how constructing ECEC policies as 'assembled' can aid us in contesting two beliefs that have a firm position in the public debate.

*Linnea Boden* narrates how the production of self-made 'bathing hats', constructed by a group of five-year-olds in the likeness of EEG caps, became vital to understanding the children's experiences within in a large Swedish intervention study. She draws on Donna Haraway's practice of 'becoming with' and describes how the making of these hats enabled a creative approach that challenged pre-fixed plans. Like Clark, Boden suggests that a focus on materialities – both in theory and in empirical research – may result in methodological insights when doing research with preschool children.

*Raichael Lock*, in turn, deals with materiality in human/animal encounters. She discusses the practice of decentering the human as an ethical pedagogical method for environmental education through posthuman pedagogies. Her paper brings out the instances where decentering appears to have occurred whilst children were exploring relations with other animals. The Workshops for Wildlife projects that she discusses function as both pedagogical interventions and as the field of research practice. The discussion highlights instances where the human has been decentered in different ways relating to human superiority, pedagogical power and power relations between beings in an ethical manner.

*James Reid's & David Swann's* contribution to the discussion on materialities in early childhood describes and problematizes the manner in which the Finnish baby box has been appropriated in other countries. Their article focuses on a Zambian project, in which the box that originally meant to serve as a sleeping place for the newborn child in the Finnish context, was changed into a 'chitenge', a multipurpose garment in order to meet the needs of the Zambian Maternal Child Health context. This change in the materiality of the box highlights the need for culturally sensitive appropriations and raises concerns about the practice of simply importing materials imbued with western, normative parenting practices in different geographical and cultural contexts.

*Antti Malinen's* article provides a historical perspective on the link between children and materiality by exploring the places and relationships that provided safe places to post-war Finnish children. The research draws on oral history as well as schoolbooks and the public debate that

took place in newspapers in order to draft a picture of how friends, dogs, riverbends and freedom of movement, among other things, provided post-war Finnish children with feelings of safety and wellbeing in a time of general scarcity and health problems. The article draws on a new-materialistic understanding that notes children's everyday agency and its relationship to both human and non-human surroundings.

As the collection of articles show, the subject of materiality can be approached from many theoretical, methodological and empirical perspectives. The articles challenge, for example, the primacy of language and instead focus on the meaning of material word and non-human relations in childhood(s). In the future, theories that pay attention to materialism could also be useful for researching topical themes such as children's action, childhood(s) and education in the time of ecological disaster and climate change. Possible themes that could be discussed through this lense include, for example, consumption, children's relation to materials of different ecological consequence and educational interventions that tackle these issues. Globally the picture is even more complex, as resources are unevenly distributed and differences in children's well-being have grown. From our perspective, materialism could offer new theoretical, ethical and empirical starting points to address these globally important issues.

We want to thank all anonymous reviewers for their contribution for the journal. And last but not least, we would like to thank all the authors of this special issue.

With best wishes,

Anna Siippainen, Susanne Ylönen & Anu Kuukka

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