

Book Notes

REFRAMING THE EVERYDAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PEDAGOGY:

CONCEPTUALISING THE MUNDANE

edited by Casey Y. Myers, Kylie Smith, Rochelle L. Hostler, and Marek Tesar

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In early childhood centers and spaces, there is an infinitude of rituals and routines that occur on any given day. However, if nominated to endorse some of the most significant of these times of day, adults—researchers and practitioners—would likely highlight only a few. Most, for example, would likely mention circle time, when children assemble and encounter ideas and texts in community. Some might endorse playtime, citing its centrality to imagination and relationship building and its potential to transmit concrete skills. Others still might advocate for time spent making marks of some sort, emphasizing how crucial fine motor skills are for both self-help and for later writing. In their edited volume *Reframing the Everyday in Early Childhood Pedagogy: Conceptualising the Mundane*, Casey Y. Myers, Kylie Smith, Rochelle L. Hostler, Marek Tesar, and the contributing authors invite practitioners and researchers to also look elsewhere. Through a sustained attention to times and spaces that are typically only meant to be moved past or through, this volume reveals a new world of significance lingering just beyond the horizon of the typical gaze. What, they ask, is it possible to see and to imagine if the worlds and lives of children, educators, and the material environments with which they are in constant cooperation are approached with a sustained curiosity?

Reframing the Everyday reads like a concerted, resistive reply to instrumentalizing practices and perspectives that reduce and oversimplify the work of early educators. It is an ode to the creative, relational, and critical capacities of practitioners and the children with whom they spend days that are “simultaneously unremarkable and highly impactful” (4). Each vignette is informed by and draws on lived experiences in the field (the editors and contributing authors currently work in or spent years working directly with young children as preschool teachers). These lived experiences may indeed be the source of the palpable authenticity and honesty that pervade each of the book’s fourteen chapters and the rituals and routines they center. The grounded vignettes and

discussions flow smoothly into one another and draw on wellsprings of critical theoretical literature, which makes for a reading experience that is challenging, satisfying, and, at all turns, eminently real.

In the first chapter, “Unlocking/Lights On,” readers join Casey Myers as she opens her school for the day. Myers punches in the door code, disables the alarm, and walks into the classrooms, where she turns on the lights in anticipation of the arrival of the human beings whose efforts, enthusiasms, and encounters will unfold within these spaces. Chapter 2, “Welcoming,” considers the processes of children’s arrival to and incorporation into the school day. Separating from caregivers, washing hands, and changing into and out of clothing are looked at not under a microscopic lens but instead through a kaleidoscopic one that shows and seeks to highlight the complexity of the lived experiences at the heart of the book. What do we ask children to divest themselves of when they cross boundaries from the external world? How do children cooperate with the more-than-human world to reveal new ways of understanding the idea of *welcome* itself? Chapters 3 and 4, “Washing Up” and “Snack Time,” move in a similar fashion through the in-between times, highlighting both the potential for relational development at each of these times as well as the ways that a reconceptualization of them might speak back to prevailing perspectives.

As the volume unfolds, we enter into other rituals. Chapter 5, “(Un)Dressing,” looks at transitional times that often involve strict management of the bodies and behaviors of children. Sunscreen and clothing move from taken-for-granted elements of a child’s life to materials through which moral questions related to bodily autonomy (e.g., who gets to decide what goes onto a child’s body and when) become concrete.

In chapter 6, “Queuing and Waiting,” we enter the hallway. After working through the anxieties of wondering about the children’s noise level, who is finding or might find them disruptive, and what strategies may keep them calm, readers encounter other possibilities. Rochelle L. Hostler asserts that “the line exists as its own event” (65) and explores how children transform the process of lining up into a resistive act filled with lingering and laughter that forges and strengthens relational threads on their own terms. Furthermore, she challenges readers to wonder if “the challenges inherent in lining up are not about the actions of one child, but rather about the perpetual systems of control, punitive management, and existential surveilling gaze, and the desires, movements, and everyday resistances of children” (66).

Chapter 7, “Moving Through the Hallway,” explores the physical and liminal space of the hallway as a site of encounter between the human and more-than-human worlds by elaborating on the concepts of *middle-ing*, children’s existence and movement both between teachers (who stand at the front and end of the line) and between their origin and destination; of *orbiting*, which alludes to the varying intensity of these experiences in liminal spaces; and of *contacting*, or the encountering of experiences that “reconfigure our experience of the

hallway, expanding and deepening our relations across space and time” (75). A prolonged reflection on these complex processes creates space for these sub-processes to appear and, as the authors intend, to provoke new questions, chief among them perhaps being, “What would we have missed?” (78) if we were not willing to give this time, to allow this possibility? The tacit question is similar: What might you, reader, be missing?

As these thoughts percolate, the day progresses and we find ourselves moving between spaces with Sonja Arndt, “Going Outside–Going Inside,” wondering at the ethical conundrum of a child who sheds layers of clothing against their parents’ wishes yet is so deeply in tune with their own body. Next, we listen in as Emmanuelle Fincham and Amanda Fellner discuss “Eating Lunch” (chapter 9) and then join Brianna Foraker for a post-structuralist consideration of “Toileting” (chapter 10), followed by an experiment in “Sleeping and Resting” (chapter 11), in which volume editor Kylie Smith interrogates notions of teachers’ complicity and dissent in the perpetuation of neoliberal policies. On waking it is time for “Tidying-Up” (chapter 12), in which Marcela Bustos and Johanna Ilja-Lien frame traditional norms of tidying up as linguistic (communicative) forms that include both embodied and attitudinal elements that may contrast with a child’s own “mother tongue” (125). What, they ask, can practitioners learn by giving children opportunities to lean into their instinctive drives or mother tongues? Is it possible that children ever desire to lean into the hegemonic language? This complication of the desire binary is precisely at the heart of this work. Children, they suggest, can feel the effects of the pull toward their own desires *and* achieve some satisfaction of adhering to structural norms—an idea that, even against the backdrop of a childhood study acknowledging the multiplicity of feelings and meanings present in a given moment, might challenge some. But this challenge, just as with complexity, is the point.

In chapter 13, Marek Tesar and Jen Boyd reflect on “Goodbyes” and usher readers into the rituals of “Locking Up and Lights Off” (chapter 14), where the volume editors reflect on how the ideas set forth in the text have coalesced into a “mundane early childhood praxis” (142). This idea is the heart of the volume and embraces “the complex nexus of relational processes, practices, and possibilities in attending to every/day as an intentional aspect of teaching and learning, deeply interwoven with theories” (142). For the authors, a mundane early childhood praxis is also inherently ethical. It embraces the tension around adults acting in influential ways in children’s lives despite what Arndt, in chapter 8, calls “the overall unknowability of children’s everydayness” (80) of the child in their entirety. This ethical praxis, then, calls teachers and educators and those who work to support and empower them to maintain a constant awareness of whether they might be simplifying, overinterpreting, or otherwise misunderstanding elements of the lives of the children to whom they dedicate their work. A mundane and ethical early childhood praxis is humble, curious, open to surprise and complexity, and deeply aware of the

entanglements of the human, more-than-human, and material worlds that are in constant collaboration and, simultaneously, tension.

As the volume concludes, the editors hope that the structure of the book “speak[s] to the extraordinary fullness of any ordinary day” (144). They more than succeed at this task. Rather than offering prescriptive directions and contingencies, they assemble a constellation of possibilities that defamiliarize the most-taken-for-granted moments in the days and spaces of early childhood centers. This collection strives not to translate theory into practice nor practice into theory; instead, and with inspiring effect, it invites theory and practice into a playful dance of imaginative possibility.

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