

Creating Sustainable Early Childhood Learning Environments: A Transformatory Posthumanist Perspective

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Over the past few years, early childhood education and care for sustainability (ECECfS) has been articulated as an essential way to stimulate the holistic development of young children. The holistic development of young children is however shaped by the experiences afforded to them which implies that children should be provided with opportunities to conceptualise, plan, do and reflect in order to teach them to pursue sustainable futures. It is reasoned that ECECfS should no longer be regarded as knowledge transmission, but it should engage young children in opportunities for change, growth and development. In fact, The World Health Organisation (2018:1) argues that “if we change the beginning of the story we change the whole story”.

Young children, compared to youth and adults in any society, are the most vulnerable to any kind of problem experienced therein, be it physical, cognitive, physiological, psychological or socio-cultural. Factors including parental engagement, socio-economic status, the COVID-19 pandemic, rurality, gender or race exacerbate educational challenges as it is the case in unequal societies like that of South Africa. Maintaining a low educational level in the early years could potentially create future conditions characterised by high levels of disadvantage, poverty and compromised health, which could result in a vicious circle of deterioration. It was intended that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development signal a worldwide pledge to facilitate access to comprehensive care and support for all young children. Arguments to focus on equitable quality education as an enabler for sustainable development have led to the adoption of sustainable developmental goal 4. ECECfS seen as a tool not only to lay the foundation for holistic development, but also to pursue sustainability. Research and various influential theorists from different parts of the world and diverse schools of thought like Jean Piaget, Len Vygotsky, Pierre Bourdieu, Tarra Yosso and Urie Bronfenbrenner have acknowledged the importance of context and quality education that focuses on the holistic development of young children by empowering them with values, skills and knowledge that could contribute significantly in shaping individual children’s potential.

ECECfS does however not exist in isolation and researchers working in the field of sustainability suggest that a synergy between holistic well-being and social change should be considered. The target of almost all nations it would seem, is to transform their systems of schooling such that early childhood education is entrenched, formalised, universalised and improved in terms of quality because it leads to social change and improvements. It constitutes the basis onto which to mount the cultivation of good and democratic citizens that are socially just, equitable, peaceful, hopeful and free, among others. Young children who have been exposed to such end up becoming productive citizens promoting democratic ethos in their communities. This special issue thus invites papers reporting on transformational and transformative early childhood education research. Quality early childhood education should ideally bring about change in skills, values and behaviours that could enable young children

to flourish while they move towards a more sustainable future. This special issue is looking for contributions that report on real, practical work conducted so that social change can be achieved. Papers that will be accepted are those that are praxis oriented, mainly couched within Posthumanist theorisation, emphasise collaborative action by teams and stakeholders in communities leading to transformation of early childhood education because they are relational and can thus address the complexity that is early childhood education from the multilayered and multi-perspectival vantage points. From this perspective, learners are seen as entangled with, connected to, and responsible for themselves, alongside the life and habitats of all humans, non-humans, the environment and the planet., among others This implies going beyond locating problems solely in the individuality of the young children, thus blaming the victim. Rather, such research should consider the micro and the macro systems containing the young children as the starting point in order to develop a nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. It should consider how identity is not exclusively 'centred', but that it is constructed in relationships with the environment made up of humans, no-human and more-than-humans. Such nuanced understandings should enable these contributions to go beyond the anthropocentric approaches informed by humanism and enlightenment's discriminatory approaches on the basis of race, gender and social class, which also includes the Posthumanist theorisation. The Posthumanist theorisation goes beyond the limited confines of and understanding of that which is human to focus on the relationalities as critical in determining identity, challenges and solutions to performance in learning. In short, papers that address real life problems using versions of actions, participatory action research involving communities larger than the school or learning -centre stakeholders will gain more traction.

Based on the above therefore papers should address any one of the following sub themes, namely:

- Transformative Early Childhood education, definition, challenges and responses
- Posthuman approaches to the implementation of transformative early childhood education
- Design thinking in early childhood education research
- Sustainability of Early childhood education praxis
- Doing early childhood education in rural and poor contexts
- Effective early child hood education in poor urban contexts, or
- Any ECD theme related to education for sustainability and social change

Finally, article submissions should align to the scope of the ***Educational Research for Social Change*** (ERSC) ***Journal*** through focussing on how qualitative research is bringing about transformation in higher education, be it research in teaching, curriculum, assessment, administration or management pertaining to early childhood education.

Please note that the ERSC does not accept articles that merely report on issues, where researchers harvest data from participants and interpret it to develop recommendations for change - the research itself must lead to some form of change in at least one of the following areas; change in the researcher, change in the participants, change in the situation.

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