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## Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI)

### What the Critical and Feminist (C&F) Research Policy Analysis Stands For

#### ESAI Special Interest Group (C&F ESAI SIG)

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In 2021 UNESCO published the International Commission on the Futures of Education report, *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*. It calls for 'a new social contract for education that can repair injustices while transforming the future'. After two years of global consultation with over one million people, it outlines the key principles that must inform this contract

'This new social contract must be grounded in human rights and based on principles of non-discrimination, social justice, respect for life, human dignity and cultural diversity. It must encompass an ethic of care, reciprocity, and solidarity. It must strengthen education as a public endeavour and a common good'.

The report recognises that both humanity itself and the earth are under threat. The threats arise not only from climate change, but from war and the related militarization of public life, new diseases, human-induced famines, forced migrations, and political and economic destabilisations. It calls on educators to be active in meeting these challenges.

The *Critical and Feminist Research Policy Analysis Special Interest Group* (C&F ESAI SIG) formed within the *Educational Studies Association of Ireland* (ESAI) is a response to this call.

The Critical and Feminist Special Interest Group (C&F ESAI SIG) was born out of a sense of urgency to reorient the direction of education, in particular to challenge the dominant neoliberal values that govern educational policy-making, nationally and internationally. Drawing on the historical work of Marxist-inspired critical (pedagogy) scholars including Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu and Paulo Freire, and feminist scholars such as Carol Gilligan, Audre Lorde, Nell Noddings, Joan Tronto and bell hooks. This C&F ESAI SIG sets out to create a new and fruitful dialogue between critical and feminist scholars within education.

While there is a wealth of research literature on education within the critical Marxist and Feminist traditions, there is limited dialogue between these distinct intellectual traditions among the academy of educators, theorists, researchers and policy actors in Ireland, the rest of Europe and globally.

Yet, a new dialogue is required to develop the radical thinking and radical care that can challenge the power of global capitalism, and the patriarchal interests that benefit from this kind of capitalist colonial power, in framing educational purposes and the often assumed relations between education, democracy and citizenship/civic engagement.

C&F ESAI SIG members recognise that education is a powerful tool in the formation of public consciousness and the possibilities for social transformation: it plays a central role in defining what is of cultural significance and of political value. Moreover, as a forum of ideological formation, education is never neutral. As Paulo Freire observed, *education works either for domestication and neutralisation or for emancipation*.

Critical and Feminist ESAI SIG (C&FSIG) members are also mindful of the scope of education: education is not confined to schooling or to what happens in universities. Much education takes place in the home, community, work place, in social, cultural and political venues that may not be defined as educational in any formal sense. With the increasing digitalisation of knowledge, education also occurs in virtual spaces online, outside of the guidance and regulation of those who define themselves as educators in the formal sense of that term.

C&F ESAI SIG members are committed to humanising education, to recognising that while education is a vital tool for the production of goods and services, and economic wellbeing, it is much more than this. Education teaches people what is of value normatively, socially, politically, affectively and culturally in public life, implicitly and explicitly. It shapes the human imagination and subjectivities and can either constrain or enhance human consciousness.

As noted in the UNESCO report,

Education systems have wrongly instilled a belief that short-term prerogatives and comforts are more important than longer-term sustainability. They have emphasised values of individual success, national competition, and economic development, to the detriment of solidarity, understanding our interdependencies, and caring for each other and the planet. (UNESCO, 2021: 11)

It is time for education to change, but not in the direction of some cruel optimism and neither from a globalising recipe of universalism born from pre-scripted standards and an over-emphasis on metrics.

As noted in the UNESCO report, we need an “education that allows us to go beyond the space we inhabit and that accompanies us into the unknown.” (ibid: 52). The C&F ESAI SIG plans to work in open conversation in ways that allow us to go beyond the contemporary spaces we inhabit and to search collaboratively for a way of doing education and policy beyond a human capital view of ‘Becoming’ for the emancipation and greater good of humanity, other species and the planet.

**C&F ESAI SIG Committee Membership:** Professor Geraldine Mooney Simmie (*Convenor*, University of Limerick); Dr. Craig Skerritt (*Treasurer*, University of Manchester); Dr. Mags Crean (National University of Ireland, Maynooth); Dr. Martin Galvin (University College Cork); Dr. Bernie Grummell (National University of Ireland, Maynooth), Professor Kathleen Lynch (Emerita, University College Dublin, Commissioner of the Irish Equality and Human Rights Commission), Dr. Eamonn Mitchell (Mary Immaculate College Limerick); and Dr. Dawn Murphy (*South East Technological University*).