



## POST-STRUCTURAL THEORY

In general terms post-structural theorists sit under the umbrella of the re-conceptualist movement. The re-conceptualists attempt to examine ways of using contemporary theory across a range of disciplines in order to increase levels of critical thinking within society. Specific to early childhood education re-conceptualist thinkers and theorists have focused their attention on issues including race, gender, sexuality, children's rights and human identity.

Post-structuralism is a body of theory, or a methodological approach in response to structuralism. Structuralism was a movement in France in the 1950s and 1960s. Structuralism studied the underlying structures inherent in cultural products such as texts, and used analytical concepts from linguistics, psychology, anthropology and other fields to understand and interpret those structures.

Post-structuralism emerged in France in the 1960s which, as some of you may remember, was a period marked by political anxiety and socio-cultural change. It was during this time that there was increased interest in alternative philosophies such as feminism (a body of knowledge that aims to understand the nature of gender inequality), western Marxism (theory informed by the work of Karl Marx which aims to explain social change in terms of economic factors), anarchism (a theory or belief based on the elimination of organisational structures within society) and phenomenology (a body of knowledge focused on the study of consciousness). Some theorists known for their post-structural scholarship include Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Jean Baudrillard and American feminist scholar, Judith Butler.

Post-structuralists argue that individuals or the 'self' as a separate, singular, and coherent entity is a fictional construct. Instead, individuals are influenced by the tensions between conflicting knowledge claims associated with gender, race, class, sexuality, disability etc.

Judith Butler, a post-structural theorist has offered great insights into our understandings relating to gender from a post-structural perspective. Butler rejects the view that gender is stable or has any origin to biology. Rather, Butler wishes to destabilize and denaturalize our gender categories that suggest women and men are constructed as opposite to each other. From a post-structural perspective, there are many ways to be a 'boy' and many ways to be a 'girl'. This opens up the possibility that gender can be practiced in different ways both in early childhood and other periods of one's life.

Fundamental to the Early Years Learning Framework is a view that children's lives are characterised by belonging, being and becoming. From a post-structural perspective:



- Children have complex and shifting identities as they move between and participate in different social groups.
- There are multiple and contested ways of knowing and learning.
- Pedagogies include a focus on seeking out how equity affects the dynamics in relationships.
- Children and adults take social action to support democratic participation and inclusion for every child and family.
- Learning experiences build or bridge the different ways of knowing and learning that children bring with them to early childhood settings.
- Educators use multiple assessment strategies and sources and different perspectives to interpret this data (DEEWR, 2009)