Respect for Early Childhood Education: Editorial

Jane Murray

Centre for Education and Research, University of Northampton, UK

IJEYE@northampton.ac.uk

Our first issue of 2020 focuses on respect for early childhood education and how ethics of care can facilitate it. Respect is important for us all because peace is contingent upon it (Sen, 2011: 44). Yet respect has had different meanings over many centuries, ranging from esteem afforded to those at a higher level within a social hierarchy to rights afforded to individuals regardless of status (Marsellas, 2017, 103). Raz (2001, 6) notes that 'We must respect what is valuable'; he argues that people are the primary 'objects of respect' (p.124), a perspective endorsed by MacMurray's (1961) claim that 'we need one another to be ourselves' (p.211). Both Raz and MacMurray posit that all people are valuable and worthy of respect, regardless of status. Equally, self-respect is 'grounded in the sense of one's own worth or value': the belief that what you are doing is worthwhile as well as the capacity to do it (Riviera-Castro, 2014: 762). Respect seems to act as a catalyst for enabling individuals and societies to flourish, while education has potential to build 'a culture of respect for all throughout society' (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2014: 12).

In England, the Archbishop of York John Sentamu has emphasised the importance of respecting children:

> *'If we expect young people to be respectful, we should show respect. If they are not treated lovingly and forgivingly, they will be unforgiving. If we do not trust them, they will not trust us.'* (Sentamu, 2006, cited in Millie, 2009: 7)

Noddings (2005a) argues that education is most effective when it is interwoven with respect through an ethic of care characterised by modelling and practising caregiving behaviours, engaging in equal dialogue to reach shared understandings, and confirming ways that we value others. Noddings' ethics of care tenets are actions which have strong potential to inculcate an ethos of respect and self-respect (Raz, 2001; Riviera-Castro, 2014). Fielding and Moss (2011: 15) endorse a similarly respectful, democratic approach to pedagogy that focuses on collaboration, relationships and listening; a model that is congruent with 'the vision of a meeting place' (Dahlberg, 2013). Yet many children are not afforded respect in education – and this is particularly the case during early childhood. Within the scope of this editorial, I highlight four of the many ways in which this tends to happen: (i) young children's access to early childhood provision, (ii) early childhood education as preparation

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for school, (iii) young children's exposure to violence, and (iv) poor investment in early childhood education and care.

Whilst children increasingly experience early childhood education and care provision across the world, at the time of writing about half of the world's children still do not, whereas more than 90% of primary aged children are enrolled in school globally (UNICEF, 2019a; 2019b). Even for children who do attend early childhood education, in recent years policymakers have tended to orientate quality monitoring towards the economic imperative of school preparation, rather than attending to what may be appropriate for individual children's needs and preferences. This trend is congruent with the United Nations global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target for early childhood development:

> *'4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education'* (United Nations, 2015).

At national and regional levels, narrow definitions of school readiness have emerged over the past decade:

> *'…certain specific skills and concepts which if developed well in children in the early pre-school years help them to enhance their social competence, adjust better in school and learn the skills of literacy and numeracy more effectively, and in a more sustained manner'* (World Bank in India, 2010: 5)
>
> *'A measure of how prepared a child is to succeed in school cognitively, socially and emotionally'* (Public Health England, 2015),
>
> '…*each child enters school ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences that best promote the child's success'* (Kentucky Department of Education, 2019).

These narrow definitions of school readiness place onus on young children to conform to adult constructs of child development norms. They align with the 2007 Global Education Monitoring Report definition of school readiness:

> *'...school readiness encompasses development in five distinct but interconnected domains – physical well being and motor development; social and emotional development; approach to learning; language development; cognitive*

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> *development and general knowledge'* (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2006: 163-4).

These limited definitions of school readiness are not congruent with UNICEF's broader definition that emerged more recently (2012):

> *'…children's readiness for school; schools' readiness for children; and families' and communities' readiness for school'* (p.2).

Noddings (2005b) proposes 'A sacrifice of freedom and creativity in the schools if it achieved a better basic education for children' may be acceptable (p.248) but Moss (2013) does not agree: he claims that early childhood provision predicated on the school readiness imperative means young children are denied agency in their own early learning.

In part because they are less likely than older children to be enrolled in educational settings, the World's youngest children are more likely than older children to be subject to violence by their primary caregivers, contributing to negative outcomes throughout their lives (UNICEF, 2017). Nevertheless, some young children encounter violence - including corporal punishment - in their early childhood education and care settings. For example, the United States Department of Education reported that 1500 children aged 3-5 years experienced corporal punishment in the United States during the academic year 2015-16, with boys and black and native American children disproportionately represented in that number (Samuels and Harwin, 2018). Subjecting young children to experiences of violence is the antithesis of respect for young children. Such experiences adversely affect brain development: they are associated with significant reduction of the brain's grey matter as well as increased tendencies to aggression, depression and addiction (Tomoda, Suzuki, Rabi, Sheu, Polcari, and Teicher, 2009).

In many countries, governments do not invest at the same level in early childhood educators as they do in teachers who work with older children (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2006; Pascal and Bertram, 2016). This situation means that in those countries early childhood educators are not as well qualified or as well paid as teachers who work with older children, making it more difficult to recruit and retain the high quality early childhood educators all young children deserve. Indeed, low investment in early childhood educators' qualifications, professional development, working conditions and pay is not only disrespectful of educators and the young children they work with, but it is also poor policymaking because it disregards robust evidence that well trained, well qualified early

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childhood educators raise the quality of provision and improve young children's lifetime outcomes (Melhuish and Gardiner, 2019; European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2014).

So far in this editorial, I have defined respect and discussed some approaches with potential to inculcate respect in early childhood and I have highlighted some areas where respect does not prevail in early childhood. Happily, while respect is not afforded universally in early childhood, it does happen: articles in this issue provide some examples of respect afforded in different early childhood contexts across the World. The first two articles focus on dialogue between adults and children, one of Noddings' elements for ethics of care (2005a). In their article '*Observations of Teacher-Child Interactions in Early Childhood Education Programs in the United Arab Emirates'*, Antje von Suchodoletz, Lydia Barza and Ross A. A. Larsen report on a study that adopted the Classroom Assessment Scoring System in kindergarten classrooms to explore associations of teacher- and classroom-level factors and quality, as well as associations between teacher–child interactions and child outcomes. The second article in this issue by Zoyah Kinkead-Clark also focuses on adult-child interactions. In her article *'Using socio-cultural lens to explore adult-child interactions in Jamaica's child care settings'*, Kinkead-Clark relates a socio-cultural study for which she used observations and interviews to identify how cultural assumptions shape workers' practices in Jamaica's childcare settings.

Federico Farini and Angela Scollan's article focuses on ways digital technologies may be used as a tool to respect children's agency. *'In, out and through digital worlds. Hybrid-transitions as a space for children's agency'* is based on an empirical study that adopted narratives to investigate how digital technologies might promote children's agency in educational settings, providing ways to recognise and affirm children's abilities, and by doing so, exemplifying confirmation (Noddings, 2005a). The fourth article in this issue includes an example of children practising caregiving behaviours (Noddings, 2005a). In their article '*"The wolf was only feeling hungry": Emotional understanding and embodied cognition through dramatic play',* Zoi Nikiforidou and James Stack report on a study for which they observed children aged 3-4 years enacting story characters in adult-initiated sessions. Among other results, Nikiforidou and Stack found that children were more likely to use emotions in their discussions when they embodied characters with emotional implications. In their paper '*Documentation panels: supporting young children's self-regulatory and metacognitive*

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abilities', Selda Aras and Feyza Tantekin Erden provide further examples of respect in early childhood settings, reified through dialogue and confirmation (Noddings, 2005a). Aras and Erden report on a qualitative study that used participant observations and interviews to investigate ways that young children applied metacognitive and self-regulatory skills for engaging in the generation of pedagogical documentation.

In her article '"Too young to read": early years practitioners' perceptions of early reading with under-threes', Karen Boardman reflects on the results of a study conducted in England which used a survey, interviews and reflective zines with early childhood practitioners working with children younger than three years. Boardman concludes that the study findings indicate that policy emphasis on a narrow conceptualisation of school readiness has intruded on the pedagogic process, producing a deficit model of provision for young children's early reading focused on technical skills. Boardman challenges this model and argues for a broader conceptualisation of early reading. The article '*A Day in the Life* of young children drawing at home and at school' by Catherine Ann Cameron, Giuliana Pinto, Claudia Stella and Anne Kathryn Hunt concludes this issue. Cameron et al. used a qualitative visual methodology to explore young children's drawing in different international contexts. In their study, Cameron et al. recorded how young children's belief systems are impacted by people they encounter in their homes and educational settings and they examined how children, their families and educators collaborate and communicate through drawings, exemplifying respectful approaches to dialogue in early childhood (Noddings, 2005a).

In conclusion, respect does not prevail universally in early childhood but if we accept that 'we need one another to be ourselves' (MacMurray, 1961: 211), we must strive for respect by valuing ourselves and others. The articles in this issue provide evidence that this is possible in the context of early childhood education through respectful actions and interactions cultivated within caregiving, democratic pedagogies (Noddings, 2005a; Fielding and Moss, 2011: 15). I am privileged to commend this collection to you.

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