

## **International Journal of Early Years Education 30 (2)**

### **All Things being Equal**

*Jane Murray*

The United Nations advocates that children's experiences of growing up should be characterised by equality (OHCHR, 1989; United Nations, 2015). Yet even before COVID-19 emerged, inequalities were a global problem for early childhood, which matters because 'Inequalities in early childhood development tend to persist into adulthood and amplify across the life course' (Lu, Cuartas, Fink, et al., 2020, 1). We know that there are strong associations between inequality and wicked problems including low life expectancy, paucity of educational and health outcomes, weak development of human capital, lack of social mobility and failed social cohesion (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; 2018). Nevertheless, in 2022 as the World emerges from global pandemic shock, aspirations that young children worldwide may experience equality seem less achievable than ever. Beginning in February 2022, Europe has experienced another wave of displaced children forced to migrate due to conflict in their Ukrainian homeland, further exacerbating inequalities experienced by children (UNICEF, 2022a). UNICEF (2022b) identifies regressive democracy, globalisation and multilateralism, combined with climate change and weak regulation of digital technologies as key factors that are increasing inequalities for young children internationally.

I am profoundly sad that equality for the World's children seems to be moving further from our grasp. That said, I cannot claim an authentic first-hand understanding of what it is to be denied opportunities or to feel othered, disenfranchised or subjugated because of ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographical location or other characteristics. As a white, educated woman indigenous to the wealthy United Kingdom, my life has been characterised by advantage. Since my birth into middle-class, middle-England in the mid-twentieth century, I have been afforded freedoms, comforts and opportunities that most others never know. Moreover, through nothing other than an accident of birth, I belong to a dominant culture that has historically wielded power to subjugate others across the World: a stain on my country's past. I wish it were otherwise.

I feel sorrow and anger in the face of the many disadvantages that inequalities have constructed for children over centuries and that these have dogged them throughout their lives, frequently being passed to subsequent generations. I long for a World where diversity is celebrated, where power and resources are shared equitably, and where opportunity and inclusion are experienced universally. I am wholly committed to doing all I can to secure that more equal World, but as

one person my contribution is limited. Nevertheless, as Editor of the *International Journal of Early Years Education* I am in a position to bring together people in order to share new knowledge with potential to inform possibilities for leveraging equality in early childhood in the future. To that end, this issue of *International Journal of Early Years Education* is a curated collection of articles that constitutes a shared commitment to working towards a more equal World and a better future for all, beginning with early childhood.

The size of this bumper issue reflects the importance we place on issues of equality in early childhood at *International Journal of Early Years Education*. Most of its articles are grouped into themes covering early childhood development (ECD) inequalities, young children as migrants and refugees, cultural diversity in early childhood, and special educational needs and inclusion – while a number of individual articles focus on poverty, early childhood development in an emerging economy and looked after children. The first theme the issue addresses is *Inequalities in Early Childhood Development*. Authors Ben Richards, Mami Umayahara, Sheena Mirpuri and Nirmala Rao open the issue with their article ‘Correlates and mediators of geo-ethnic inequalities in child development in Cambodia’, which is followed by ‘Childhood confined by COVID-19 in Italy and the impacts on the right to education’ authored by Fernando Alves, Aline Sommerhalder, Concetta La Rocca, Massimo Margottini and Luana Zanoto and an article by Carla Peixoto e Meo de Carvalho, Joana Cadima and Theresa B. Leal: ‘Mothers’ Educational Level and Literacy Beliefs: Associations with Home Literacy Experiences’. The issue then turns to its second theme: ‘*Young Children as Migrants and Refugees*’. The first article that addresses this theme is ‘Understanding social inclusion: A narrative inquiry into the experiences of refugee families with young children’, by Vera Caine, Hiroko Kubota, Heather Raymond and Jean D. Clandinin. Next is an article by Laurent Ndjuyé and Pambas Basil with the title ‘Role of Fathers’ Involvement on Children's Development in Tanzania: Comparison between Camped-Refugees and Local Majorities’, followed by ‘Exploring the early years needs of Venezuelan migrant children in Trinidad and Tobago’, authored by Zoyah Kinkead-Clark and Sabeerah Abdul-Majied. Sandra Lyndon’s ‘Early years practitioners’ personal and professional narratives of poverty’ features next, as a standalone article concerning poverty.

Eight articles focused on ‘*Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood*’ comprise the next theme covered in the issue. The first - ‘Executive Functions of Preschoolers with Different Levels of Cultural Congruence’ – by Daria Bukhalenkova, Larisa Bayanova, Rezeda Popova and Aleksander Veraksa – is followed by articles by Su-Hie Ting and Lipina Jintang - ‘Teacher and

students' languaging practices in a multi-ethnic preschool' - and Zeynep Temiz: 'Challenges and Coping Strategies for Preschool Teachers with Children who cannot Speak Majority Language'. An article by Antje von Suchodoletz, Ross Larsen, Fitim Uka, Iryna Nadyukova, Eija Pakarinen and Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen 'Investigating Quality Indicators of Early Childhood Education Programs in Kosovo, Ukraine and Finland' appears next. Articles follow by Youngji Son - 'Critical Literacy Practices in a Multicultural Book Club' - and Mia Cecile Heller and Vibeke Grøver - 'Teachers' Instructional Talk in a Partly Scripted Language Intervention Targeting Young Language-Minority Learners: Developments Over Time'. The final two articles in the section addressing '*Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood*' are 'Multiple perspectives on the benefits of teaching of Vietnamese to preschool children in an Australian early childhood context' by Vinh To, Karen Swabey, Andy Bown and Bao Thai and 'The impact of medium of instruction on Hong Kong ethnic minority kindergarten children's learning Chinese', authored by Shek Kam Tse, Emily Y.W. Pang, Heiken To, Pik Fong Tsui and Lu Sai Lam.

The issue then focuses on a single paper concerned with early childhood development in an emerging economy: 'Early Childhood Education and Child Development Outcomes in Developing Countries: Empirical Evidence from Thailand' is authored by Piriya Pholphirul and Orapan Buain. Six articles concerned with the theme '*Special Educational Needs and Inclusion*' follow. An article by Linda Palla and Ann-Christina Vallberg Roth - 'Inclusive ideals and special educational methods in and out of tact' - is followed by 'Assessing issues of inclusive education from the perspectives of Thai early childhood teachers', authored by Joseph Agbenyega and Sunanta Klibthong. The next article is 'Employing Assistive Technologies in Teaching Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Settings: Teachers' Perceptions' by Yousef Arouri, DIala Hamaidi, Asma Al Attiyah and Kholoud Dababneh. Elizabeth Done, Mandy Andrews and Clare Evenden are the authors of '(C)old beginnings and technologies of rectification in early years education: the implications for teachers and children with special educational needs' and the penultimate article in this section - "'I am big; he is little": Interrogating the effects of developmental discourse among children in the inclusive early childhood classroom' is authored by Karen Watson. The last article within this theme is 'Teachers' beliefs about peer social interactions in Chinese inclusive preschools and their relationship to practice', by Run Tan, Susanne Schwab and Sonja Perren. The final article in this issue devoted to equality in early childhood is a standalone article: 'A cultural-historical study of institutional care: How collective play creates new conditions for orphaned children', authored by Xianyu Meng, Marilyn Fleer, Liang Li and Marie Hammer.

The Education Research Abstracts section, authored by Elizabeth Coates, completes this issue 'All Things being Equal' for *International Journal of Early Years Education*. I commend its contents to you, and warmly encourage you to share our commitment to securing early childhood as the starting point for a more equal World and a better future for all.

Jane Murray PhD

*Centre for Education and Research, University of Northampton, UK*

ORCID: 0000-0001-7000-0901

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