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Sustaining Development in International Early Years Education

Following my appointment as Editor for the *International Journal of Early Years Education* earlier this year, I value greatly the privilege of writing my first Editorial. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the task is daunting, given the journal’s provenance. I am grateful to my immediate predecessor Colette Gray for the work she has done which has helped me in these early months, and this is a good time to remember that the *International Journal of Early Years Education* was first edited in 1993 by Elizabeth Coates, who remains an Editorial Board member today. Over its 23-year lifetime the Journal has become a highly respected publication in its field. The Journal began soon after the inception of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 1989), prompting Elizabeth Coates (1993:5) to note in her first editorial that IJYE was ‘devoted to the promotion of effective early years education worldwide’ in a context of change.

The global field of early childhood has developed exponentially since 1993, with universal early childhood education identified recently as a major international target within the Sustainable Development Goals:

> ‘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).

The UN rationale for early childhood development, care and pre-primary education - to prepare children for primary education - may be debated, but the target is there: it recognises early childhood as an essential catalyst for human development and in doing so, shines a light on our field. That field is concerned with education in its broadest sense for our youngest citizens, wherever they are in their communities across the World. The eclectic nature of learning provision across the World for the youngest children is indicated by its numerous monikers in English alone, including early childhood, early childhood development, pre-school education, kindergarten, early childhood development and care, nursery, pre-primary education, early childhood education, early childhood education and care, early childhood care and education and, of course, early years’ education. The variations in early years’ education are its value where those variations equate to affordances that respect the needs of individual young children, their families and their practitioners. This is a challenging – and challenged – area, however: as the UN target indicates, policymakers align their ambitions for the field with ‘quality’, but what is ‘quality’? If ‘quality’ equates to measurable standards, then it tends to equate to homogeneity. Giving young children ‘access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education’ is far more complex than merely complying with standards and it relies on policymakers who trust practitioners to know their children and families, their communities and their field. Knowing the field of early years’ education and shaping that dynamic field, with its multiple disciplines, complexities and contested narratives lies at the heart of the work undertaken by the *International Journal of Early Years Education*. The Journal is a space where practitioners and researchers in our field can debate new ideas, practices, policies and research concerning early years’ education across the World. The rise in global prominence of early childhood education will only increase the significant role that the *International Journal of Early Years Education* has had for almost a quarter of a century in disseminating and informing eclectic discourses at the cutting edge of the field.
The articles in this final issue of 2016 are unusual for a general issue of the *International Journal of Early Years Education* in that they have a common focus: in different ways, they report studies about young children’s communication with others. However, the methodological approaches these studies used to generate evidence exemplify the eclectic nature of the field of early years’ education. To accommodate the appropriate number of pages across Volume 24, this fourth issue has just three articles in addition to the Editorial: the three papers carry powerful messages for the field. Caron Carter and Cathy Nutbrown’s study on a ‘Pedagogy of Friendship’ adopted qualitative methods that were meaningful for participating young children and enabled the researchers to explore ways that children aged 5-6 years in an English primary school said they learn and develop in friendships with one another. These qualitative methods elicited the children’s authentic views about friendships in their ‘lived everyday experiences’, revealing new insights about peer culture as part of early learning. The second article in this issue is another paper from England: Carolyn Blackburn and Carol Aubrey highlight the translation of policy into practice concerning early intervention for young children who present with speech, language and communication delays and difficulties. A mixed method approach was adopted for this study to secure the views of early childhood practitioners who were variably qualified, as well as observation data concerning children aged 2-5 years in a range of early childhood provision. Findings include challenges around early intervention for young children with mild to moderate speech, communication and language difficulties in different English contexts. The final article in this issue focuses on a quantitative study undertaken by Fathi Ilmeideh and Fatima Al-Maadadi to investigate kindergarten teachers’ beliefs concerning early writing development as part of the Qatari kindergarten curriculum. Their study found that whilst kindergarten teachers had awareness of young children’s writing development, the value they attributed to writing composition was subordinate to the value they attributed to concepts and mechanisms of writing. These findings carry important messages concerning top-down approaches to early years’ education. I commend these articles to you, however and wherever in the World you are engaged in early years’ education.

To complete my first Editorial for the *International Journal of Early Years Education*, I include a new Call for Papers to early years’ practitioners and researchers which reflects the Journal’s aims and scope, whilst acknowledging the increasing global policy focus on early years’ education. The *International Journal of Early Years Education* seeks high quality research articles that reflect contemporary international discourses focused on innovative practices, theories and policies concerning early education in its many forms. The ways these may be used to enhance equity, opportunities and outcomes for children aged 0-8 years in diverse countries, contexts and communities are of significant interest to our international readership. All research articles in the *International Journal of Early Years Education* undergo editorial screening and rigorous double blind peer review. To find out more about the *International Journal of Early Years Education* and to submit your paper please click [www.tandfonline.com/ciey](http://www.tandfonline.com/ciey). We look forward to learning more about your work in early years’ education.

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