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Editorial

Early Years Education as a Global Village

A recent article by Kary Stewart in the UK newspaper *The Guardian* highlights the emphasis that Cuba has accorded early childhood development programmes for over 60 years, such that the country’s children enjoy universal holistic early childhood provision. Focus on families, integrated services, risk prevention and early detection, equality, diversity and accessibility characterise the approach that has led to ‘significant child development outcomes’ in Cuba. This is money well spent: as Pia Rebello Britto - UNICEF’s senior adviser and global chief for early childhood development - remarks in Stewart’s article, the earliest years are the phase in the life-course when humans have the most capacity to be affected by their environment. The quality of the nutrition, health, love, stimulation and learning that young children experience during their earliest years deeply affects their lifetime outcomes. This is, of course, the rationale for the United Nation’s international target focused on early childhood development, and in this first issue of 2017, we are privileged to catch glimpses of important work that is being done in our field of early years’ education across three of the World’s continents: Asia, Africa and Europe.

In diverse ways, the three opening articles in this first issue of 2017 focus on interactions in early childhood education and care. In his discursive article ‘A dynamic learning concept in early years education: A possible way to prevent schoolification’, Stig Broström proposes that the pre-primary approach may be inappropriate for early years’ education. He advocates instead for the social pedagogic approach based on play that is commonly found in several central European and Nordic countries. Broström argues that young children’s learning is dynamic and is optimised when adults have authentic respect for the child’s motives, creativity, imagination and agency, as well as providing for meaningful experiences and shared interactions with others. Shared interactions are also a focus of Sarah Cousins’ article ‘Practitioners’ constructions of love in Early Childhood Education and Care’. Cousins reports on a small-scale qualitative study for which early childhood practitioners’ narratives were captured about love in the context of early childhood education and care provision in England. She found that participating practitioners defined and constructed love in different ways for early childhood practice and among her conclusions, she suggests that practitioners might consider how they can ensure that young children can experience love in their early childhood settings. In their paper ‘Parental engagement strategies in Greek and Nigerian preschool settings: Cross-country comparison’, Konstantina Rentzou and Adefunke Ekine asked practitioners to complete a survey in order to explore and compare ways that parents and practitioners in early childhood settings engage in young children’s early education in two diverse countries: Greece and Nigeria. Their findings suggest that parental engagement was not prioritised by the participating early childhood practitioners in either country.

The remaining papers in this issue focus on two other aspects of early childhood practice: gender and ICT used as a pedagogic tool. In a paper that provides fascinating research insights into early childhood practice in Pakistan, Almina Pardhan and Janette Pelletier consider ‘Pakistani pre-primary teachers’ perceptions and practices related to gender in young children’. Their empirical research included interviews and observations, and found that whilst participating teachers regarded boys and girls differently they wanted to attempt to ‘push gender boundaries’ in respect of children’s play and learning. In the final paper of this issue “‘Horrible or happy – we’ll have a little grey now’: Aesthetic judgments in young children’s narration with an interactive whiteboard”, Ewa Skantz Åberg reports on an empirical study which investigated Swedish six-year olds’ activity when their teacher had instructed them to create digital narratives using an interactive whiteboard. Skantz Åberg found
a mismatch between the children’s attraction to the visual and their teacher’s agenda which focused on supporting them to create narratives.

In this issue, I am also pleased to alert readers to the return of the Education Research Abstracts section. The feature provides a curated selection of abstracts from articles reporting research that have appeared in other international early childhood journals. I am confident that readers will find this resource invaluable and am grateful to our Editorial Board member Elizabeth Coates for lending her expertise as ERA Editor.

This issue provides exciting opportunities for our readers from across the World to engage with emerging discourses and new research concerning diverse aspects of early years’ education in a range of countries. Through that engagement, we share a common interest in exploring and understanding ways that our youngest children develop and learn. This is our international community of practice: early years’ education as a global village.

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References
